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Is Marriage a Failure?

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Is Marriage a Failure?

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BY GUS MILLER,

*Author of "The Western Beauty," "Lucy Dalton, the
Female Detective," Etc.*

The human heart—the harp that breathes in softest notes the delicious strains of harmonious love—is the most delicate and sensitive organ in the entire system of man's susceptible nature; so, when the velvet touch of woman's hand is felt no more upon its vibrating chords, set to congenial love, there is a palling, a gloomy silence. No other woman can enter the deserted sanctuary and reproduce what has been wasted upon the arid soil of another's heartlessness.

—THE AUTHOR.

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IS MARRIAGE A FAILURE ?

CHAPTER I.

What female beauty but an air divine,
Through which the mind's all gentle graces shine ?
They, like the sun, irradiate all between ;
The body charms because the soul is seen.
Hence men are often captives of a face,
They know not why, of no peculiar grace.
Some forms, though bright, no mortal man can bear ;
Some, none resist, though exceeding fair.

—Young.

I have gazed on many a brighter face,
But ne'er on one for years,
Where beauty left so soft a trace
As it had left on hers.

—Mrs Welby.

“This is a dreary, empty world, with its confusion and bitter disappointments,” soliloquized Norman Wellington, as he meditatively sauntered along one of the principal thoroughfares of Nashville. “I am growing weary of this turmoil. I need rest,” he continued, with little connection in his thoughts, as he fastened his thumbs in his vest sleeves ; lowering his eyes upon the pavement with a still deeper meditative air, “I am not doing any good here in this bustling city with its rumbling tide of business ; well, there is little money to be made here, but a fellow had as well be in Halifax as just to be doing half-well. Perseverance and determination will assuredly wear away the crust of opposition, and the royal letters of success will yet crown my efforts with triumph. No, I will not leave Nashville this year, but, with a more attentive watch upon my business, I will strive to attain the goal of my life.” With this new resolution adopted in the convention of his mind, he dropped his hands from his vest sleeves and hastened his step in the direction of his store.

It was early in the morning and there were only a few people upon the streets. The shop hands and clerks of every department had gone to their work an hour ago. A few straggling dudes and idle curiosity gazers were languidly moping along, giving themselves full swing as they drifted from first one side of the pavement to the other.

Norman Wellington, inspired by new hopes, gave his eyes wide range as he advanced rapidly up Market street. Just as he reached its termination and was on the eve of turning at right angles, two beautiful women, of stately height and graceful carriage, issued from a confectionery store at his side. He paused in dumb astonishment, as his eyes searchingly swept across their faces. "What a perfect coincidence," he involuntarily exclaimed to himself. "Two women alike, and yet they have made a distinct impression upon my mind," he thought, as he followed them in the direction of his own store. They did not stop. He felt a little disappointed, but would not acknowledge it to himself.

After an hour's consultation with his head salesman, he left the office, and, with arms folded upon his breast, walked to and fro the one hundred and fifty feet building; he was trying to review the two past years of his business life in a way that he might profit by his own experience. But in the midst of his most absorbing meditations that face, not an hour old, would rise up in his mind's eye,

"A form of life and light
That, seen, became a part of sight,
And rose, wherever he turned his eye,
The morning star of memory,"

consuming all the nourishment of thought. This was something marvelously strange in his life, because he was intensely practical, thoroughly concentrative in one purpose, bending all the will power of his nature in one way, permitting none of the varied fantasies and pleasures of a large city to detract his mind into other channels. His sole object was to make money, and here the united forces of a concentrated mind had

worked with unceasing energy, slowly but surely cutting the way through various opposing obstacles until his success and industry had won for him a fair rating in business circles.

On this morning a feeling of deep depression o'ershadowed him; for a while the goal of his life, viewed from his present condition, was shrouded in densest mist; he seriously contemplated seeking new fields for work; but now to him, as to us all, hope's siren voice whispered and his feelings regained their wonted buoyancy.

Though Norman Wellington was prepossessing in appearance, entertaining and rather brilliant in conversation, he had never been a devotee of society, though a love for the ideal was largely developed in his phrenological outlines; he had confined his study to a minute—instead of a general—analysis of the problem embracing man's temporal success. He was a confirmed recluse from everything that did not embody money, living exclusively within the predominating love of his own life, regulating the minor tendencies to the realms of non-consideration. So when he realized that his mind had been susceptible to an impression, however vague, which his strong will power refused to eliminate from memory, he became restless and a little dispossessed. Staring out into the street, an indefinable light and expression radiating from his eyes, yet nothing was more foreign to his idea than love or any of its baser or kindred subjects. He ever contended that his mind was too sensible and practical to even learn the first lesson in anything so Utopian as what the world designated—love.

Norman Wellington, as yet, had never been under the sway of anything so near akin to sentimentality as on this eventful day, when, at short intervals, his mind in an unguarded moment wandered back to those faces he met on the street.

In spite of his own rigid protestation, his heart would assert: "There is something indefinable in that face, bearing a vague resemblance to some visionary conception of my innate faculties." Still he

would not listen to the strong intimation that came up from within, preferring to let his bark remain launched upon the broad and ample bosom of useful life, rather than follow the uncertain call of some unknown and chimerical god.

He was just preparing to go out on the street to look for some country customers, whom he was expecting in the city on that day, when Richard Allen, a prominent officer in a wealthy banking concern, appeared in the door. Norman could always pose himself with ease and dignity before a financial magnate, and never neglected an opportunity to exchange ideas with them. He now met Mr. Allen in the door with a hearty shake of the hand, followed by a pressing invitation to go with him back into the "office," where they could get comfortable chairs. Mr. Allen thanked the young merchant as he extended his arm.

When they had thrown themselves luxuriously into some handsome office chairs, Norman observed with some little feeling of importance, "Business a little cramped, I see from today's financial report. Money tight, and merchants' paper at a great depreciation."

"A gloomy outlook indeed; however, I do not give much of my time to these heavy, monotonous subjects now. To tell you the truth, Wellington, my fortune, as you know, is already made. When I was a young man like yourself, starting out in the world with only a few thousands, I kept very conversant on these topics," responded the banker with an air of great superiority.

Norman became enraptured when he heard a rich man talk, rendering himself totally blind to all the faults the speaker might possess. So when Richard Allen referred to his present independent circumstances, he wondered how long ere his condition in life would render him independent and call out his name upon the roll of (as he believed) imperishable fame.

"What is the present outlook in Nashville for

fall and winter trade?" catechised the young merchant, determined to avail himself of all the practical information he could during this time of convenience.

"I believe our last report spoke favorably of the future for the South," briefly stated Mr. Allen.

"When money is stringent in the Eastern markets there is usually a corresponding depression of results throughout the South; but I believe there is no rule so general but what there is sometimes an exception," responded Norman, inclined to enter into a detailed discussion of the subject. But he had yet to learn the true character of the man with whom he so eagerly conversed; he had yet to learn that there was more in this life to live for than sordid gold.

"It is a very difficult matter for us to always determine what the future will be. I am inclined to think that money-making is all a game of chance," replied Mr. Allen evasively.

"Do all rich men entertain similar ideas to yours, as to how a man gets wealthy?" asked Norman, disposed to question the truth of Mr. Allen's opinion.

"You cannot find any class of men who have the same views on the same subjects. But, Wellington, this money-making business has ceased to be a living thought with me now."

"Your aspirations have been gratified, I presume," rejoined Norman.

"Entirely, sir. I shall only give that part of my attention to the subject necessary to retain what I have, without making any additional accumulation."

"Then your life is about over," continued Norman.

"Just begun. Real life begins when we are placed by virtue of our circumstances above the real hardships of this world."

"That is a novel position to me," asserted Mr. Wellington.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the conceited banker. "When you are as old in years and experience as I am you will want to pass your life away from the monotonous routine of useful employment. I have a large

fortune, Wellington, and after a few years I anticipate to enjoy it. You see I am not an old man; only two score and five; besides, I am remarkably well preserved. There is no reason why I should not travel—spend my summers cruising on the northern lakes or rambling o'er the mountains of Switzerland. My winters pass beneath the sunny skies of the southern zone."

If Norman Wellington had been the man he was five years later in his life, he would have defined the shallow depths of Richard Allen's character with mathematical accuracy. But his inordinate desire to be wealthy made every man a peer who had money.

Before he could reply, Mr. Allen sprang to his feet, looked up the long aisle toward the door, where he heard the soft notes of a woman's voice. "Wellington," he exclaimed, "there is my wife; come and get acquainted with her; she will make you a splendid customer. A customer who always has the cash to pay down is worth two who promise to pay tomorrow and never pay at all."

Mr. Allen's nature was thoroughly saturated with vanity and conceit, and upon every occasion he sought an opportunity in which to make it known. He was totally destitute of those higher instincts of true manhood, such as stability of character, firmness of purpose and concentration of energy (except in a certain way).

Without looking in the direction of the lady who was talking, Norman followed the banker to the front counter. As they approached it he heard a musical voice exclaim in modest astonishment: "Why, are you here? We were in hopes we would elude you this morning, as we have some heavy bills to make." There was something in the clear, sweet intonation that aroused Norman's soul to a thoughtful surprise. When he involuntarily held out his hand to meet the white, shapely one offered him, his eyes once more beamed upon the beautiful face that had so startled him in the morning.

"And this is our sister, Miss Iris Earle," contin-

ued Mr. Allen as he completed the introduction.

"We are having some lovely weather," observed Norman to Miss Earle, not knowing anything better with which to preface his remarks.

"It is very delightful in the country, where the atmosphere is wholesome; but I think it a little too warm to be comfortably pleasant in the city," she replied with a smile upon her lips.

"Sister has remarked, on one or two occasions this morning, her want of love for the city," said Mrs. Allen, as a soft laugh rippled over her lips, disclosing her pearly teeth so pure and perfect.

"She was under the influence of the heat then," responded Norman.

"Iris has ever been partial towards the country," explained Mr. Allen.

"I have never been out at Rosedale, but if it is as beautiful as represented, I am not surprised at Miss Earle's choice," rejoined Mr. Wellington.

"I would almost prefer a hut in the country to a palace in the city. Not that I do not appreciate society, but I like freedom—that pure atmosphere which only a person can breathe who lives in the rural districts," asserted Iris, manifesting a strong degree of positiveness.

After a few minutes conversation the ladies began their shopping. Mr. Allen departed, saying he had some important matters to attend to that morning. Norman, for some unknown cause to himself, kept his position near Mrs. Allen, but without prolonging the conversation. He was much surprised, and without any reason, that either one of the ladies were married.

Lois Allen and Iris Earle never looked more exquisitely beautiful than on this May morning, when the air was resonant with new life, and the sun, kissing the skylight, threw his mellowed rays in subdued profusion upon this wilderness of goods, reflecting a still softer light upon the velvety complexion of their lovely faces, whose delicately tinted hue rivaled the soft petals of a blush rose.

Norman's soul, until now blind to the luring grace of female beauty, opened its eyes, while its surprised voice sang :

“The fairness of her face no tongue can tell,
For she the daughters of all women's race
And angels eke, in beauty doth excel.
Sparkled on her from God's own glorious face,
And more increast by her own goodly grace
That doth far exceed all human thought,
Ne, can on earth compared be to naught.”

Though to his rational judgment he would not have confessed he thought her pretty. Again, he would question his inner self: “Why can I not keep my eyes away from her! I do not look at Miss Earle, and they seem just alike. Ah! it is a freak of the imagination. There is nothing in the whole affair. When they pass out of that door they pass out of my life, old habits will be resumed and I will not think of them again. But she is supremely beautiful—that is if the term is an admissible one. Well, beauty is all a mistake, any way? it is nothing more than the effect of a perverted imagination; still there is an indefinable expression beaming from under those silken lashes that fastens me into her presence as insensibly as the mystery of magic. But I must leave off this worse than nonsense!”

He walked back into the office on some shallow pretense, though he owned no excuse save to elude the presence of her who exercised such a strange magnetic power over him. As he turned to go away, a pair of soft brown eyes shyly followed him. Some one else had been peculiarly impressed. Soon the echo of their departing steps was borne to his ears; involuntarily rising from his seat he retraced his steps to the front counter.

“Mr. Wellington, you will owe me a valuable present when I get married,” observed the clerk who had waited upon the ladies.

“How is that?” queried the young merchant.

“I have sold the largest cash bill of the season, and I guarantee to the prettiest women that have been in the store this year,” he answered.

"That should recompense you, then ; but for my part I don't ever see much difference in the appearance of women," replied Norman.

"Did I understand that old braggadocio banker to introduce one of them to you as his wife?"

Norman bowed his head, adding, "That is Richard Allen, one of the wealthiest men in the state."

"Yes, I knew he was, and also that, outside of his money, he is not respected except by the rabble and the menial classes. He has no moral aim in life, and the motives of his mind are the ripe effects of degeneracy. Those ladies had the outward appearance of being inwardly his superiors."

"Well, so a man has money, that procures all the other necessities of this life," interrupted Norman.

"I think you are mistaken upon that point ; but, back to the ladies. Did you ever see such a remarkable coincidence? Two persons the exact counterpart of each other ; as much alike as if they had the same individuality. I scrutinized them closely, and one is identically the same in expression as the other. Surely they could make a fortune out of their remarkable resemblance."

By this time every idle clerk had joined the two speakers, and were now adding their mite of information on the subject discussed.

Mrs. Allen and her sister rarely ever went into society together, but when they did, never failed to produce an endless commotion of wonderment. Their personal appearance would not meet an universal applause for beauty. But what beauty failed to radiate from their faces is best expressed by the poet :

"But that which fairest is, but few behold,
Their minds adorned with virtues manifold."

Though they had access to all that money would command, they never dressed gorgeously or extravagantly ; their plain, simple style of dress beautifully typified the inward grace of manners and purity of heart which each possessed.

On this morning Lois wore a handsomely fitting costume of gray nuns-veiling made plainly, only a few

plaits and panels relieving the monotony of the front view. The soft folds fell around her lithe form, revealing her stately beauty with artistic effect. Snowy linen bands encircled neck and wrist. Her hair, black as the wings of night and soft as silken down, was coiled in an artistic pouf, on which rested a gray hat of English straw, that enhanced the lovely proportions of her faultless figure. Her white hand, moulded to grace, supported a plain gold band upon its first finger, while upon the third scintillated a diamond of the brightest lustre. The well rounded and dimpled wrist was bare of ornament, shaming the white cuff in its fairness. Her front hair lay upon her classic brow in jetty ringlets, shading the bright, dark eye from which they caught the light,

"As if their graceful loops were made
To keep that glorious eye in shade,
And holier make its tranquil spell,
Like waters in a shaded well."

Her face, of a rich olive tint, was not perfect in its symmetry, yet the irregularities were so vaguely indistinct when contrasted with the exquisite loveliness of its expression that none of their traces were perceptible.

Lois Allen was beautiful—divinely beautiful—in the soul comprehension of that figure. Iris, her exact counterpart, so far as the visible outlines of figure and complexion extended, upon this occasion contrasted her appearance by relieving it with a garnet costume made of soft, thin material.

Norman retired to his private office, where he surrendered his thoughts to abstract meditation. When the town clock tolled six, he arose from his chair, saying, "Those eyes hold an image somewhere in the locked vaults of memory. But I must not think of her again." With this determination momentarily planted in his mind, he walked to the door; after turning the key he bade his numerous clerks adieu and walked away in the direction of his boarding house, where a gentle, trusting wife sat in the second story, peering down upon the pavement, eagerly watching for him.

CHAPTER II.

NORMAN WELLINGTON AND WIFE.

Who never doubted, never half believed.
Where doubt there truth is—'tis her shadow.

—Bailey.

Life's sunniest hours are not without
The shadow of some lingering doubt.

—Whittier.

With only a limited education, Norman Wellington entered the rugged road of the active worker. Cheered by energy and hope, he carelessly surveyed the future and lightly considered the responsibilities of life. His was one of those natures that men are wont to analyze and yet so rarely comprehend correctly. Though he so readily grasped the exigencies of life, gloomy forebodings, that at times darken the pathway of every one, dropped their sombre shadows around him. At such periods he was apt to sink despairingly into despondency, and for weeks afterwards traces of sadness were interwoven with every expression of his face. His most intimate friends never gained an insight into the inward motions of his life; there were certain bounds within which he lived which completely concealed his true nature from others, challenging—but to baffle—the tried skill of the physiognomist.

His reticence as to his own feelings, interests and intentions might have been the result of circumstances attending his early life. It was not in consequence of lack of confidence in humanity that he was not communicative when in the society of his best friends; but it was his disposition to ever keep within the confines of his own knowledge the private counsel of his own heart. At the early age of eight years he left the home of his parents to live at the mercy of friends and relatives. Thus early thrown upon self, no wonder that now he denies entrance to the secret confines of his soul. The path he wandered from childhood to manhood was by no means a

smooth one ; the hardships, the trials, the temptations that line the road of every poor orphan were repeated in his struggle for triumph over opposition.

After his marriage (with limited means and experience) he embarked in the mercantile ship ; buoyant with hope, the shining coast of wealth seemed attainable. Confining himself closely to business, he made it a limited success. He never advised with or sought the counsel of any one ; his ambition was to make money ; his god, his pleasure were in the contest for success. He respected every wish of his wife, but the heart that, since his conjugal life, had worshipped business, had never given itself to the enjoyment of any woman's companionship.

At the peep of dawning day he would rise from his couch ; in a few minutes be out on the dusky street, hastening to his work. As he passed down one street, across to another block, he was not thinking of friends, relatives or wife ; his one consuming thought was gold, and it was the charming love for gold that gave quickness and elasticity to his steps. When the worshipped, the courted spot was reached, his pale yet stern face would brighten, the eyes that viewed the hovels or the five story bricks with such little interest, now opened wide with eagerness, and a looker-on could see he had reached the home of his heart.

Long before the clerks or porter would arrive, the show windows were draped in the most artistic folds, and the show stands were in their proper places. Long before the chosen bookkeeper would make his appearance, the huge ledger and journal had been critically examined by an eye that never failed to detect error ; and if a wrong entrance had been made the book-keeper never escaped a sharp reprimand.

Norman Wellington's store was his home ; though young, he cared not for the skating rink, the dancing hall, the theater, the gaming tables, or the recreation of mingling with the immense crowds that throng the hotel corridors ; next to his business was his wife. From his store he immediately repaired to his own

apartments in one of the first boarding houses of the city, where his kind and affectionate companion was ever ready to welcome him with a smile called forth by what she deemed love—and which certainly was deep respect.

It was 6 o'clock in the evening after Lois Allen's visit to the store that Norman went home sad and wearied with the day's labor. He did not care for any supper, so went to his room, desiring, if possible, to seclude himself so as to forget a strange and mysterious feeling of disappointment that seemed to bear upon his heart.

Mrs. Wellington had gone to the dining room, but soon returned with the natural query, "Norman, why did you not stop for supper?"

"I don't feel like eating supper, Alice," was the brief response.

"Why, are you sick? I suppose some poor fellow has died who owed you a dime, or a teamster fell from his wagon, crippling himself, who owed you a nickle, and you are grieving for the heavy losses you must inevitably sustain in consequence of the misfortune of these poor ones," she laughingly replied, realizing to the fullest extent his inordinate love of gold.

"No, Alice, you do me injustice in your inference as to the cause of my not wishing any supper. I am not near the disciple of Plutus as you intimate; yet I hope to be wealthy some day; it is that hope which sharpens my wits and stirs within me the desire to live. But unlike the goddess, Fortuna, I am not blind. The loss of the insignificant amounts you mention would scarcely arrest my appetite."

Taking a seat near Norman she apologetically replied: "I guess it is in order for me to make amends for my impulsive speech. I did not mean to reflect on your good name in my supposition. Knowing you are so wedded to your business, it was so natural for me to taunt you with something of that nature. While I would not apply to you the name 'miser,' yet I would not fear to state that you worship

gold more than your wife. Now, tell me what is the matter tonight. Are you sick?"

"No, Alice, I am not ill; something affects me which I cannot explain. I do not mean that I withhold any secret from you. I will have emerged from my present depressed spirits by morning and will be myself again."

"But, Norman, am I not the one who should share the burden of your troubles? Am I not your wife? According to the first law given to man, your helpmeet?"

"Yes, you are my wife; but my troubles are my own. You were made the weaker vessel; therefore I should bear your troubles, and not you mine. In this instance, if the order was vice versa, I would be equally as incapable of an explanation as now."

"I do not understand you, Norman. Why can't you explain to me? Are there certain secrets so dear that you cannot impart them? Have you hidden troubles that I cannot know? You are strange!"

"I am strange, in that I do not court the plaudits of society. I am strange, in that I love my business more than the soft smiles of fair faces. I am strange, in that I choose to maintain my individuality by a suppression of my true feelings. I am strange, in that I am not a good husband. I should never have married if, as I believe, my presence has ceased to be a source of pleasure. My faults are so numerous, they must provoke reproof. But, Alice, be gentle with me; in time you may teach me to be a man after your own heart, and cause me to turn from my unsociable nature and assume one congenial to yours."

The persuasive words fell on unheeding ears. In an instant Alice Wellington's soul had revolted and claimed perfect trust or none at all; till now the passions of her life had slumbered; unconscious now of their awakening, she allowed anger to sweep the chords of her being as she replied: "Yes, I might have been happy if I had never married you. But I cannot compromise my pride by bowing at your feet as your slave, in humble submission to your stubborn

will, with the faint hope of reclaiming you. No, I do not possess the magnetism to work reformation in your settled habits. You must ever remain as you are, if I am the only means of your salvation. Will I ever be happy with you? Did I ever love you?"

Here Norman mechanically arose from his seat and stood at the window, where he pretended to be looking out into the street. Suddenly turning towards his wife, his face pale and worn, he raised his hand to his brow and said calmly: "Alice, I don't believe in the existence of what you term—love. Poets speak of a never dying love; they have written page after page and book after book in defining love; but how empty it all seems to me. If I am mistaken and the time should ever come when I kneel in humble plight before that shrine, it will be at the instigation of a law higher than earth. Indeed, if there is such a thing as love, it can only implant itself in the heart when two have met whom God made one in the beginning."

"Stop, Norman," commanded his wife. "I cannot hear you talk of love. You rarely ever do; but when you do, you are so inconsistent, you bound from one extreme to the other. I sometimes think you do not live and enjoy life like other people. You live and breathe in a different latitude to them. You have a wife, but you had no heart to give her. I have often looked upon your calm face, when meditation stilled every nerve in your frame, but I have never seen a tear of sympathy or regret fall from your eyes. Tears come from the heart, not from the eyes. You have bright, expressive eyes, but they do not mirror your soul. You do not love me, in that you are too cruel; if you ever love a woman, to her you will be *too kind*: you will be her serf, as you would be my tyrant. I love you as it is my duty, but I cannot always give up to you. I must at least retain my identity. I will never harass you by my tenderness again. I have been foolish in the past to pain and annoy you with whimsical notions of sentiment. You have many faults, and I am thankful my eyes

are not blinded with the glamour of love so much but what I can see them—faults so perceptible that they will furnish my captious mind with sufficient stimulance as to guarantee its activity.”

“Alice,” rejoined Norman gravely, “when the time comes that I have nothing to do but dissect your nature in order to find your faults, that I may use them as a means of overcoming the good influences you exert over me, then I shall hold my position and depravity to be the most self-contemptuous. I have the deepest abhorrence and contempt for those who cavil at petty faults.”

Having failed to study her nature, he grasped not the passion that now controlled her, and continued: “If I am not like other people in the main, why should you remind me of it in such deplorable terms? Did I have the formation and refining process of my general character in my hands, or was it the culmination of one of God’s foreseen certainties? When you insist that I shall literally conform to your idea of true manhood, you superiorize yourself with a presumption wholly unwarrantable to any one person belonging to frail humanity. Have I not sweet intuitions, in whose triumphs I revel with as much delight as those whose pre-eminence characterizes them among the courted public? My concession and conformity to the strict demands and necessities of my vocation I conceive to be my whole duty to my dependencies.

“Then until you, my only and chief satellite, have failed to receive the vi—condescension, your reprimand is a palpable insult to pride and ambition. As to my inconsistency, that is easily understood. Unless we could occupy the same premises it would be quite impossible for us to draw the same conclusions; facts are not deducible from false premises; our reasoning may be good, when the thing ascertained may be false; the erroneous conclusions being dependent upon the false premises. For illustration, if you and I should go to examine a piece of goods: you view it through a pair of green lenses, while I

look at it through a pair of blue ones, while still a third party looks at it with his natural eye. The goods appear green to you, and you affirm it. You know you are right; you could not be wrong. They appear blue to me, and I affirm it with as much earnestness as you did they were green. But the third party, with his premises correct, knows we are both wrong; he only can tell the true color of the goods. Might it not be, dear Alice, that you have the wrong data from which to reason out metaphysics?

"Your ideas seem to have undergone no real change since you emerged from the ephemeral dream you call 'love.' Then, since these notions of yours were formed while you were under ban, might they not have been conceived in mental blindness? The declaration that you are not blinded by the glamour of love admits of only one inference, and that is, 'all who are in love are blind.' Then, since the blind need a leader, might it not be in full accord with common law, propriety, and in order to leave no stain upon the jewel, consistency, for you to rely upon me as your chief counsellor and leader?"

Exasperated beyond endurance by his clear, taunting logic, Mrs. Wellington, with suppressed anger and wounded pride, sought retreat by dismissing the subject, and added, "Norman, why continue this very unpleasant conversation? I am sure neither of us will be benefitted by it. Let us endeavor to forget and bear with each others faults."

"I am willing to end where you are. You know I have never manifested a spirit of contention, so if it is your pleasure to let questions upon which we cannot agree rest, I will join you."

"I think you misunderstand me. I do not mean to relinquish my ideas upon general topics, so much that I will have no views to express, because I cannot always see things as you do," she quickly replied; adding, "However, I detest family brawls; therefore I shall never say anything to encourage them. We must try to live more for each other."

Doubtless Mrs. Wellington would have contin-

ued, but a news-carrier appeared at the door with an *Evening Banner*. Mr. Wellington, against his usual custom, bought one. As soon as they were alone again he remarked, "If I had been myself I would have left off buying this paper. You have talked to me so much tonight that I have lost my usual composure. But I will read it; perhaps I will get the worth of it."

"I hope so," Alice could not refrain from adding, sarcastically.

"Well, here it is, now," continued Norman as if he had not heard his wife's interruption. "Meeting of the stockholders of the First National Bank; Richard Allen elected President." Dreamily putting aside the paper, he said, half unconscious of what he was doing, "Mr. Allen and his pretty wife complimented my store this forenoon by a substantial purchase."

"Why, Norman," broke in his wife in half feigned astonishment, "I never heard you speak of any woman as beautiful before. I must see this Mrs. Allen. What rare charms of beauty she must possess to make so sudden conquest of your stony heart! Who knows but what you will yet fall to the level of your sex."

"Control yourself, Alice," he answered, his voice betraying less composure than at any previous interview. "I simply said the lady was pretty," he continued. "I might have said the same of a flower, a picture, a piece of architecture, or anything else I admire. I have seen nothing on the present occasion to provoke this ebullition of feeling. Be more considerate."

"Well, well, Norman," rejoined his wife, surprised and interested; "and really I heard you aright before, and it was no lapsus linguæ? But you really persist in heaping compliments upon the banker's wife." This was said pleasantly; but a close observer could have detected a ring of suppressed scorn in her voice, of which she was not wholly unconscious.

"Alice, I do not think you represent me fairly. I may not have had occasion prior to this to express my views of all my acquaintances. And what if I should never have seen a lady before whom I thought a model, would that be strange? Might it not be that I have not met many ladies in my life who were Mrs. Allen's superiors in every branch of attainment, and also that no circumstance attended our meeting to attract my observation?"

With an expression created by curiosity, though tinged with doubt, she eagerly questioned: "And am I to conclude that some extraordinary phenomenon attended your meeting with Mrs. Allen, and fully developed your dormant faculties in praise of her beauty? Truly this age is progressive, and woman divine that can elicit commendation from such a stoic."

"Again you are wrong in your surmises, Alice. Our meeting was very commonplace, and only a few words passed between us. As you on a clear, cloudless day feel the coming storm in the sultry air, and your soul dons the robe of physical fear, so my mind, when brought into the presence of so much eminence, involuntarily opened its gates in recognition, yet deigned me no reason for the overflow."

Again baffled in her attempt to enter the secret chamber of her husband's mind, she despairingly yielded to fate. Slowly she turned from her seat and began studiously to arrange some books on a small walnut stand that stood near Norman. This done, with an attempt at reconciliation, she said: "Let us let the matter rest now. I hope we may never have cause to resurrect the subject again." With these words she bade her husband good-night.

It was several hours later when Norman arose from his seat and went to the window, where he could see the stars as they emerged from the eastern horizon. Something in the far-off sky, dotted with twinkling constellations, reminded him of the past.—the far-off past. This night Norman Wellington's heart was full of sad reflections. For the first time during his life he sat down to brood over his troubles

and add more to the list. For the first time he felt an ungratified longing in his heart ; for what, he knew not. Thus he questioned himself :

“ What have I seen today to make me so unpleasant and to so vaguely lift the veil of oblivion? Could I forget these unpleasant recurrences? I seem to have passed my life in a dream, thinking of nothing but money and its equivalents. Tonight my dream has vanished ; I have awakened from my long slumber and behold behind me an awful wreck.”

At this point he caught the glow of the rising moon. All the world seemed wrapped in the silence of sleep. The hour was eleven. The moon beamed into the face of the lone meditator. Suddenly, though only for a moment, a beautiful vision, whether real or the spectre of a distorted imagination, appeared before him. Only a moment it pressed the retina of vision and then vanished, leaving the beholder a graver and more thoughtful man.

CHAPTER III.

A CHANGE.

Wealth has never given happiness, but often hasteneth misery.—Tupper.

Sour discontent that quarrels with our fate,
May give fresh smart, but not the old abate;
The uneasy passions, disingenuous wit,
The ill reveals, but hides the benefit.

—Sir Richard Blackmore.

Four years have passed since that eventful day, when Norman Wellington became a changed man ; changed to himself and to the world. During this short period he prospered ; his income increased from a pittance to plenty ; no longer he worried excessively over business affairs. During this time his wife had never spoken of the subject that had so ruthlessly torn perfect trust from her heart ; she had no desire to resurrect it. She kept a close watch upon him. Why

he could forget his cold, calculating designs, step from under the immediate cares of his own business, and return home—not for social entertainment, anything but that—but to read and meditate, was a strangeness she could not peaceably reconcile to her mind.

Although she sometimes fancied her husband's change and indifference the outgrowth of his eccentricities, yet there was an inward fear that he was unhappy; and whatever might be the cause, she felt it was beyond her power to fathom its depths; and if by some mysterious revelation she was ever able to fathom it, she felt there would be no accessible remedy by which she could liberate his heart from the pangs of regret and sorrow.

How often we see people in the world who have an insight into the true character, motives and affections of others, yet in reference to them they are silent, no expression ever comes from them to betray their observations. Alice Wellington belonged to this class; she had her own sorrows and troubles; but had long since schooled herself to bear them without complaint. Since the night she avowed to Norman her determination not to talk sentiment again to him, she had been true to her word. While she did not possess that deep and decided love for her husband that is often given, yet she respected him and taught herself to believe she was ever ready to obey him.

In her own heart there was a vacancy which her husband's presence and deportment failed to supply. Sometimes she pictured a bright future of what "might be," if Norman would but be as kind and attentive as she desired him to be. Then her mind would revert to the first months of their married life, when she was petted and given what she deemed a husband's warmest and most affectionate treatment. Yet those early days of nuptial life were not cloudless. There was still a void; perfect content did not come to her, even then, with what she thought kindest attention from the man she married. If in the past, when the heart was tender and susceptible, she had failed to appreciate, and had complained bitterly

to him for what he conscientiously believed to be his solemn and pledged duty, was it not likely the same peevishness of character would work out a similar sequence, though she could reach out her arm and bring him to her side again? Then why wish for that which when obtained, will be worthless in advancing happiness?

Alice Wellington unfortunately possessed one of those natures that cannot be satisfied by love or money. Her nature, complex in its character, contradictory in its practice, sneered at the possible and endeavored to grasp the impossible. Ever ready to assert her intentions, she was rarely found prosecuting them to their legitimate end. Only of late had she learned to seek the plaudits of society; having been reared in a silent country atmosphere, she had lived for herself, treasuring up her own thoughts without demonstration, and pondering over the fruits of her own imagination; but now her nature had undergone a complete and radical transformation.

Two years prior to this chapter she had persuaded Norman to give up their small and scantily furnished apartment on Vine street, and seek a home near the city in the country; and, in a very short time, she was installed mistress of Elmwood—her present home.

Just two miles from Nashville, on the W. G. pike, nestling in the borders of Elm Forest is unpretentious Elmwood. Seen from the road it presented a toy-homestead appearance; a small cottage with only two front rooms composed the buildings; the grounds were handsomely laid off; on either side were tall and stately elms, whose graceful boughs had withstood the storms and shakes of two centuries.

Seated in the small, balustraded portico was Norman. He had just returned from the city, where he had spent the day in detailing his business to his chief man; he was now devouring the contents of the *Banner*. Mrs. Wellington was out calling; she had been out since 1 o'clock, so he was informed by his trusty servant; where she was gone or when she would return was of but little interest to him. He gave her

all the privilege of going and coming that the conditions of weather and circumstances would grant. If she wanted to do anything or go anywhere he had no opposition to offer, or approval to express.

During the last few years he had become acquainted with Mr. Allen and wife, and had transacted all of his business through the First National Bank. Through this a confidential relationship had been formed. Although between the two families there could be no social intimacy, yet as neighbors they recognized each other as acquaintances; and when Mr. Allen or his accomplished and beautiful wife, as they often did, vouchsafed to consider Norman and Alice with the social honor that was embraced in an amicable call, they were always delighted, and felt that another plume had been added to their crown.

While the wealthy banker would not have recognized, in the royal circles in which he was leader, those who did not have by wealth, or otherwise, an acknowledged claim upon the privileges of society, his gentle wife was kind to all.

Often Norman sat in the little portico, among the vines and flowers, his mind divested of the myriad, irregular scenes of the day, meditating with a restless and unhappy heart. He thought if he could have just such friends as his silent ponderings conjured up, he might bathe his troubled mind in the cool and vivifying spring of contentment. At these musings his mind ever reverted to the warm and genial presence of one person. Why it did so, he never questioned. That it was love he never dreamed.

After glancing over the *Banner* with hurried impatience, he laid it aside, not to think of his temporal welfare, as had been his custom a few years ago, but to think of that which the present failed to foreshadow. Now his eyes sought a large octagonal stone building towering two story that stood opposite him across the road. The open space in front of the beautiful and imposing structure sloped naturally down to the bounding walls; it was laid out in terraced walks, each one fringed with miniature green walls of fir

and hemlock. At the rear a row of tall trees formed a back-ground shaded to delicious coolness.

Norman had often looked upon this imposing mansion and viewed its magnificent grounds with enthused admiration, but he had never been so deeply interested in one of its inmates as now.

Rosedale, the name by which some idea of the beauty of this spot was communicated to the gentry of all lands, was the loveliest place in all Tennessee. Its boundary walls, inclosing acres of meadows, had been built ages ago; they were now coated with poison ivy and lichen. The lawns and meadows were as smooth as velvet, with that rare and peculiar evenness that falls from the hand of time, dotted with an occasional summer-house, whose covering was of deep rich foliage and the luxuriantly blooming honeysuckle, while the nicely kept carriage drive was over-arched by an avenue of maple trees.

Rosedale mansion was commodious and handsomely constructed. A flight of steps, drilled from a solid stone, led into a vestibule, which opened into a spacious hall, whose floor was tessellated in brown and white stones. It was a reception room of imposing size and dimensions, decorated with statuary and rare old paintings, amid whose scenes seemed to lurk beautiful reflections of hidden wells of light; also vases of flowers whose fragrant petals, constantly renewed by the practical and trusty gardener, never seemed to fade. A winding flight of polished marble steps led to the upper hall and to the balustraded gallery, which extended all around the main building; its railing, hung with rich old tapestry brought from China's looms, and folds of dusky eastern silk, seemed to exhale rare perfumes of sandalwood and teuk.

To the right of the hall was the drawing-room, an oval shaped and spacious apartment. The floor was black and garnet marble, cut in diamond shaped blocks, with an oval of Turkey carpeting covering its center. The ceiling was high, paneled off into little Swiss landscapes; the walls were rose-colored and checkered into crystal mirrors; curtains of the same

tint concealed the high mullioned windows.

On this lovely summer evening the occupants of this exquisitely beautiful room were three; near the center table of dark heavy wood in grotesque carvings, apparently amusing himself with some flowers that filled a gilded basket, was seated a man of thirty and five years, of medium height and over average weight; he had a broad forehead with a contracted brow, and rather a heavy expression upon his face. His eyes, a clear steel gray, were arched by heavy lashes of the same hue as the thick chestnut hair that shaded from view his most unworthy features. His face, buried in a short coarse beard, though sometimes pleasant, bore no mark of noble lineage, nor intercepted the keen intuition of the physiognomist in his search for the cardinal principles of human nobility.

One would think, to view his sallow face of Malay type, with its true expression interpreted, that the germinal seed of honor that leads men into the usefulness of life, had never been seen. This person was Richard Allen, a banker of business character and habits. With all of his faults and doubtful true inwardness of character, he had redeeming features that made him warm admirers from that class of individuals who do not make honor the pride of ambition. He was social and genial in his courtesy to man,—social to gratify an insatiable desire for loquacity; genial—because it was his only source to kill the dull hours of the long days. It was his disposition to make those pleasant around him whom he deemed worthy of his attention.

Bold and outspoken in his belief, but rarely ever correct in his native opinion, yet ever ready and willing to benefit the public by its full rendering; he sometimes manifested those inborn faculties of the human mind—self-conceit and vanity associated with one of those double natures, that seek by instinct a level, and courts the way to popularity by an unwarrantable position. His cheerful, jovial disposition was one that apologized to society for many of the dark, defective points in his character.

Untaught by public sentiment and unacquainted with his life, one would not discern the depth of his moral stamina with correctness. Richard Allen could not be called a man degenerate, and absolutely devoid of principles; for he had many good and appreciative traits. He was kind to his wife and never failed to accord her that right and privilege which belongs to every woman. He was particularly fond of pets and children. Yet his mind would drift to subjects of temporal interest, and while considering them, he never thought what it might cost others. So he reasoned without conviction or restraint.

Sitting in a reclining chair, embossed with crimson velvet, her dark head buried in its cushioned back, was a lady; she was watching the sunset through the filmy folds of eastern lace, that fell like fleecy clouds over the oriel window that opened to the western balcony. Her soft, tapering, jeweled hands lay hidden within the folds of her thin white dress, her arms, bare to the creamy dimpled elbows, were clasped by a plain hasp of gold: around the perfect sloping shoulders was a fichu of finest lace and tulle, held closely to the milky white neck by a pin of plain gold, and then drawn over the full, deep, sighing breast and fastened at her waist by a boquet of carnations and chrysanthemums; her dainty feet, resting on a Persian rug, were encased in satin slippers that showed to perfection a beautiful instep.

Her queenly figure was turned with every motion of grace, its curves and lines straight and sculptural: her head queenly in beauty, was covered with hair, fine, soft, and black, which lay coiled in a Grecian knot, fastened with a gold dagger studded with pearl; her thin, translucent ears corresponded well with her little patrician nose; her high, classic forehead strongly, clearly bore the insignia of an inborn lady; her soft, expressive eyes were fringed with silken, black lashes, which gave additional fire to their expression. Her skin was of a rich, clear olive,—fine grained and velvety as calla lily leaf, with the carmine glow of perfect health upon either cheek.

Such was Mrs. Richard Allen and such were her surroundings on this lovely evening. She had just returned from a matinee at one of the fashionable theaters. Here in her own luxurious, stately apartments she was sadly engaged in her own reflections. She was a wife, surrounded by wealth and everything it could buy, yet she was painfully unhappy. In the depths of her heart, the germ of all pleasure, there was a vacancy, do what she would, she could not fill its aching void.

Lois Allen was a true and noble type of her sex; but not faultless as some novel heroines are. As a representative of her sex she was only human, not wanting in any of those rare instincts of feminine character, for interwoven in every fibre of her nature was natural born honor and purity. Some races we may study for a lifetime without learning all expressed in them; such a face had Lois.

Nature had endowed her with those magnetic charms that win the love and admiration of all who knew her; thus she never lacked for attention from friends or admirers. Apart from her extreme beauty she possessed an inward grace and goodness that shone with such splendor as to give her the profoundest respect of all.

Standing in front of Lois, just inside the oriel window, was her sister, Iris Earle. She too was watching the sunset. She had the same fair, round face, with the symmetrical beauty of her sister. Two faces and two forms could not have been more alike; they had the same sweet musical voices, the same grace of manners. Their most intimate friends could not distinguish them apart. Only those who had seen them together could tell they were different persons. Many who lived in that vicinity thought there was but one lady at Rosedale Mansion. Often Mr. Allen found himself confused to know which of the two sisters was his wife; often Iris was forced to say, "You are mistaken," or become the recipient of caresses intended for Lois.

As Iris stood watching, with intense interest the

glow of dying day, she turned and looked quietly into the darkening room. Something strangely sad in Lois' face, as her head rested on the back of the large chair, attracted her attention; her white face was turned to the softening light of day, while her hand rested on a statuette of superior skill, that filled the space near her.

Iris, seeing her wrapped in the solitude of her own reflection, forgot the brilliant scene now fading in the west, and asked in a low tone: "Lois, why do you look so grave this evening? Usually when you have been to such an entertainment you come home in your gayest mood."

Mr. Allen, overhearing the question, interjected, "Yes, Lois, be kind enough to give the cause of your solemnity; perhaps we can do something to relieve you of its stupefying effects."

Without noticing her husband's remarks, she opened her eyes and dreamily placed their soft light upon Iris—her exact counterpart—as she answered, "You must think me sad every time you see me not talking. Sometimes I like to commune with self in silence; besides, I am somewhat fatigued from my evening's dissipation."

Mr. Allen, turning restlessly in his seat, said, "I should think there would be no occasion to commune with your own spirit while in the presence of Iris. You might break the monotony by giving her the advantage of your meditations. You are so much alike you ought to be one. Do you not sometimes meet with Iris and think you are standing before your mirror?"

Lois turned her white face to her husband, as she queried, "What did you say?"

"Nothing," was the laughing response.

"I did not know people could talk without saying something," replied Iris in that calm, earnest tone that was so natural with her.

"Yes," rejoined Lois, "Richard, give us the benefit of what you said. You could not have spoken without conveying some idea."

Mr. Allen arose from his seat as she ceased speaking and said, "No, I will not disturb you and Iris to-night. I have some business in town; will doubtless be detained all night. I will attend the opera."

Without turning to say good-bye, he walked away.

Lois felt a little pleasure at his going. "I can have the night to myself and talk to Iris undisturbed," were her thoughts.

When the last sound of his retreating footsteps had vanished, Iris deserted the oriel window and came near Lois, saying, "Sister, I have often seen in your life what you would gladly keep concealed from me and all the world."

"Iris, you are such a prodigy. What is it so precious to me—that I guard so carefully—yet its existence is known to others?"

Impulsively Iris folded the beautiful form in her arms; removing the black tresses from her white brow, she kissed her gently as she reprovingly replied, "My dear, unhappy sister, ever since we have been together I have loved you very much. I have watched after and thought of you more than I have of self. Without you I would be perfectly alone in the world; without me you would be worse than alone. We are not dearer to each other than we should be. Why should you know anything that in the nature of circumstances belongs entirely to me? You are unhappy. Don't stare at me so blankly. If such are the facts, and you have unintentionally communicated them to me, I surely am not to blame; and it is not by any sin of yours that your life is what it now is. The millions that are going in every direction of life are all human, 'none perfect, no, not one,' says the divine record. They are all liable to sin, to disappointment and to utter hopelessness in this life."

Lois threw her exquisitely beautiful and white arms around her sister's neck, as she buried her tear-stained face on her bosom, as if to hide all the misery and humiliation written there.

Iris had touched a tender chord in Lois' life; one

she prayed, and fully believed, no mortal man or woman would ever know. She was miserable because her married life was almost a fatal disappointment. Now she was deeply humiliated because another had filched the secret from her.

Suddenly the powerful sobs were hushed, and Lois unclasped her arms from her sister's neck. Mechanically she arose to a full sitting posture, a mingled expression of sorrow, regret and love on the proud face, as she calmly said, "I know I am not perfect; nor do I think my past has been moulded by wise and considerate actions. Yet, under the same circumstances, I doubtless would commit the same errors that now bind me; then, why regret that which circumstances have fostered into irremediable existence? The future and duty are before me; by the fulfillment of the latter the former will be made brighter.

"My existence is a fact. The duties that devolve upon me, if performed, are but tributaries to a peaceful hour in which to die. I am perfectly sensible of every fault I have. I am painfully cognizant that sometimes an unconscious sigh or a sorrowful expression may betray me. Yes, Iris, I am very unhappy; but I don't want to burden you with my wretchedness. One usually has trials enough of their own to bear, without borrowing from others."

"That is true, Lois; but you know I have no cares or troubles of my own, and I feel that your life is a part of mine. Love nor marriage has never filled my heart with despair or responsibility. I have no one to care for but you. During all this time you have bravely foreborne to speak of your troubles, yet I knew they existed. I have discerned and now tell you the cause: You are not married happily. I have watched you contend with your God-given nature and put down that which would make your husband unhappy. I have seen you give and receive caresses which, in the nature of things, were repulsive to you; yet you are known as the most affectionate of wives.

"A few evenings ago, as we were returning from the city, we came to Mr. Wellington's store. You

asked him to ride home with us. On several occasions prior to this you have done the same thing. Do not turn so pale; I do not mean to reproach you. In acting this way you may not do right, for you know Mr. Wellington stands far below you in the social scale, and it might evoke some unpleasant criticism. But I do not blame you for it; I am sure your motives are pure. Though on some occasions, in the last few months, I have seen your passionate, emotional nature excited, as revealed in the soft depths of your expressive eyes, yet there is no hope of happiness. You have wealth and access to all that culture and civilization has bequeathed to the world; but, in the much coveted morsel, the world's mock sweetness has turned to bitterness."

Lois, having arisen from her seat and posed herself against a large statuette of some old design, here exclaimed, "Oh, sister, let us defer this conversation to some other time. When I am more composed I will tell you all I know of myself. I can trust you with my heart. Ring for lights and let us go to the conservatory."

When the waxen candles were burning in their silver sconces, the twin sisters led each other to the conservatory, where, amidst scented flowers and tropical vines, a dainty repast awaited them. The unrivaled charm of the scene touched not the throbbing bosom of Lois; leaving her tea untouched, she at once retired to her private boudoir. Her heart heavy with an untold sorrow, she threw herself undressed upon her couch.

"Was fate ever so cruel to woman?" she thought.

She had known ever since her marriage that she did not, and could not, love her husband. The more she condemned herself and tried to love, the more obstinate became her heart. She often asked herself, was it a sin not to love him; she could not believe it was. It was the one grand and fatal mistake of her life, that she married; then could it be a sin not to love and cherish that which formed itself in error, and against which the purer and nobler instincts of her

heart rebelled? "No," she told herself, "it could not be." Had she been only illiterate she might have loved and thereby been happy; but he was coarse, unrefined, and unprincipled in his dealing with his fellow-men.

She knew many ladies, highly cultured in mind and soul, who had illiterate husbands, whom they loved; yet these men were honored and guided by the highest principles of integrity. True she had wealth; but, at times she felt if justice was done, her fortune would be small. Thus she meditated for hours; after which she arose and undressed herself.

Having donned her night robe, she opened a window that gave egress to the western balcony; she drew a chair near it and sat down to calmly reflect on the matters which were so near her heart. Raising her eyes she looked across the terraced grounds; there was a light in the shadow of the dark woods that lay beyond. She too well knew from whose room the light was shining. It was at Elmwood, and in Norman Wellington's room. She wondered if he saw the light in hers, and was thinking of her as she was of him.

Thus she communed with herself: "I must not think of him; he has a wife to love and protect, and I cannot love him honorably. O, sister, is it possible you have found out that which I blush to admit to myself? Although I have often feared it was love, yet I have never analyzed my feelings, lest my apprehension I found true. How can I even acknowledge to myself that I love another save he whom I have promised to love and share the burden of life?"

Then she tried to think of something else. She turned her eyes into the dark, silent night, secretly wishing she might, or could, dream away her future in like solitude. Charms of life and hope of happiness had almost ceased to be the sweet incentive to move forward into the light of another day.

The dark, impenetrable night, the unearthly stillness gave vigor to her hopeless meditations and magnified the troubles that lay so sorely upon her bleeding heart.

When she looked again the dim, flickering light, that shone beneath the boughs of the stately elms, was gone. As she arose to retire she called to mind a quotation from May's continuation of Lucan :

"Night's silent reign had robbed the world of light,
To lend in view a greater benefit,
Repose and sleep ; when every mortal breast
Whom care or grief permitted took thier rest.

CHAPTER IV.

I LOVE HIM.

Love is not to be reasoned down, or lost;
'Tis second life; it grows into the soul,
Warms every vein and beats in every pulse.

—Addison.

'Tis not a fault to love.
The strong, the brave, the virtuous and the wise
Sink into the soft captivity together.

The next morning the sun was high in the east when Iris knocked at Lois' door ; no response issued from within. Gently she unbolted the door and entered. Lois, unconscious of the bright morning sun's shining through the open latticed window, still slept ; resting from the burning ordeal through which she had passed, in her mind, during the last day.

Iris walked to her bedside ; she looked down, with deep admiration, upon the beautiful face, with its pearly tints and symmetrical curves. Involuntarily kissing the white brow, she began to place in order the disarranged room. When she had finished by placing a pair of embroidered slippers on a foot-stool at the bedside, she sat down and tenderly drew the beautiful head, with its magnificent hair, into her lap.

As she watched the fair sleeper, she said, though not audibly: "Sister, I wish I could give you that peace of mind, that tranquility of heart, that would remove from the path of existence you are destined to travel every trace of sorrow and disappointment. There are but few natures in this world like yours ;

few hearts imbued with that depth of feeling, with that divine temperament that capacitates the heart for the reciprocity and enjoyment of the highest pleasures and blessings. Oh! inauspicious fate, to sink into the darkest trenches of despair and hopelessness this heart! My dear sister, the world is unworthy to judge you; their nature is common and vulgar, while yours rises above the coarse, and approximates in purity and elevation of purpose to those who have tried to live without sin.

“Those who have not loved with their whole hearts, and at the stern, imperative instigation of nature, are unfit to pass sentence upon the sweet passion that lies buried beneath your alabaster bosom. Good and pure men must ever condemn with unwavering reproach, and ever discountenance such a love as yours; in passing sentence upon your uncontrollable indifference to your husband, and your moods of darkest despondency, their judgment will not be modified by mitigating circumstances. The ruling passion of love that lies firmly implanted in every fibre of your divinely wrought nature, pleads with the voice of a successful attorney; but its injured, its stifled, its unholy voice fails to reach the ear of consideration. And what is sweetest of all to woman is gone—her name—that which she has proudly guarded with all the vigilance of her soul, bearing as her watchword—

‘Woman’s honour
Is as nice as ermine—will not bear a stain.’”

She inclined her head forward and touched with her pure lips the closed eyelids of her still sleeping sister. Continuing her soliloquy she said: “Whatever action this strange love may lead you to consider, I will never desert you. From these warm castle walls, the extravagant representation of wealth, I will follow you into the cold, bleak world. I have, since your married life, been an incumbrance upon your hospitality; you have been more than generous and sisterly to me. Now I will be to you. How strange it must be to love! I do not understand any of its

sweet, indefinable principles. Oh that you, my dear sister, had never felt its strange, its magnetic power!

"Had any one except your dear, fascinating self made such pretensions, as your actions sometimes indicate, I would call the love part a myth. Sometimes, when thinking of your strange unhappiness, I am forced to bitterly condemn you as wanting in pride and the necessary elements of a perfect lady. Yes, sister, while I am now under the influence of your presence, my consciousness of right forces me to look with disdain upon this developing history, that, I fear, will too soon be opened for all eyes to read; but I may judge you wrong. What my intuitive senses and instincts have disclosed to me may be without foundation.

"So I must not feed my mind upon an opinion until I am sure there is occasion for alarm." As she looked upon the face so much like her own, she could scarcely believe in her own fears. Again she renewed her vow to stand by her sister in all future troubles, and this determination was sealed with all the firmness of her woman's nature.

Replacing the queenly head upon the soft pillow, she noiselessly left the room; resolving in her mind to watch with patience the coming of events, and if she saw her sister acting with marked imprudence she would turn Larates and check what might become a scandal of the most savory taste to the gossiping world.

When Iris descended the winding balustraded stairway and entered the hall, she met Mr. Allen, who said in his usual style, "How did you pass the night? Did any ghosts come to disturb you in my absence?"

"Oh, we passed over the night quite undisturbed, thank you," replied Iris.

"Did you not go to Elmwood last night?" asked Mr. Allen.

"No, sir; why should we have gone over there? With the servants, I am sure we felt quite safe at home," rejoined Iris, betraying a slight uneasiness as

to what her reply might evoke.

Without noticing the spirited manner in which his very civil question had been answered, Mr. Allen continued: "Then you have not heard of the very sad accident which befell Mrs. Wellington yesterday?"

Iris, calming herself almost sufficiently to feel an interest in the conversation, lifted her superb face, with its dark, rich beauty, until her eyes met those of her brother-in-law, then queried, "Was it serious, or something trivial?"

"Would you call death a light affair?"

"Of course not; but you do not mean to say anything so sad has taken place so near us, and we have not been advised of it?"

"Yes; Norman Wellington's wife lies sleeping this morning with the shroud of death thrown about her. Yes; she who was living yesterday at noon, with the promise of many years to enjoy the sweetness of life, was suddenly brought into the presence of eternity. And now motionless, pale and lifeless she sleeps in the cradle of endless duration, from which never again to rise to behold with loved friends the beauties of this world."

"Pray tell me the cause of this sad affair."

"Yesterday in the afternoon Mrs. Wellington went out for a drive; being charmed with the freshness of the country atmosphere, she was out longer than it seemed; and while returning home, driving very rapidly, her horses took sudden fright, and while they were recklessly mad, dashing along the country road, the carriage wheel struck a boulder and she was thrown from her seat and instantly killed. The funeral exercises will be at 3 p. m, today."

With this he walked away, leaving Iris to her own reflections and to form whatever opinions she might choose. No sooner were his footsteps heard upon one of the rear verandas, than she hastily retraced her steps to Lois' apartment. She knocked softly; a sweet voice from within said, "Come in." She turned the pearly knob and obeyed. Lois was

up; she had attired herself in a dressing gown; her little French maid, Fanchette, was dressing her hair. The long, black, silken tresses hung loose over the perfect, peerless shoulders, resting their even ends upon the Brussels, whose softness buried the sound of footsteps.

Iris did not speak, but gently approached Lois for the morning caress, then walked away to a chair near the window, waiting, she knew not why, to impart the dreadful news to her. She looked out in the direction of Elmwood; the sunlight glistened brightly on the elms that grandly towered around the home of the bereaved; its bright rays—were they typical of the far away future of one of its inmates?

Iris thought the morning atmosphere seemed impregnated with a calmness that tacitly foretold of sadder events than had ever yet clouded her existence. She had no reason for these unpleasant premonitions, and there had been no precursory warning as a prologue to what might transpire in the future; yet she had strong inward convictions which, in spite of her will to believe otherwise, would boil to the surface in her feelings and direct her thoughts.

Often in the existence of every one there are strange and half perfect illuminations that flash along the ridge of thought, making us much wiser than we were before, though without imparting new vigor or strength to our powers of conception, or giving us a perfect and altogether plausible reason for the faith that is in us; nevertheless these sudden but limited revelations of nature will occur.

The beauty of the sunlight nor the stately green trees engrossed Iris' thoughts this morning; they were with her sister, and now she turned her eyes upon her. Fanchette had carefully done her work, and with that presumptuous smile so natural to maids was admiring the effects of her skill.

As Iris turned she said, "Miss Lois, you are so pretty. There are many ladies in England who would give their vast wealth in exchange for your hair and eyes. I summered five years ago with one

of the royal ladies of her majesty at Lake Como. There I saw lords, queens and ladies from all lands. When there was a grand ball or entertainment of any kind my services were solicited. But, Miss Lois, under the soft skies that beamed over the crystal bosom of Lake Como, I never looked upon one of those pampered daughters of wealth and nobility, in their glittering silk and pearls, who was half so fair as you in your morning robe. Do not smile at me as if I was not sincere in my praise. Your face, so sweet and wonderful in its marvelous beauty, should you ever tread my own loved land, would find its due appreciation. In Paris you would be crowned with immortelles. I once went with the Empress' daughter to Worth's. He looked at Mademoiselle a moment, then said she would be most troublesome to fit; that, in order to make her a model of grace and beauty of form, he would be forced to relieve her defects by artificial appliances. The famous artist would delight to favor you with the benefit of his vast experience. It would be the skilled and ingenious hand of art embellishing nature's finest and most perfect work. I have been with wealthy ladies at the summer resorts of the Black Forest, in France and Italy, on Switzerland's mountain tops, at America's admired Long Branch and Saratoga, but all this beauty would pale before the lovely daughter of the 'Volunteer State.' Bowing gracefully to her mistress she retired from the boudoir, leaving the sisters alone.

Lois was first to speak, her voice gentle and full, giving to each word a perfect accent; to Iris her words were threaded with a tone, softening and sympathetic in its effects. She, like the bland and effusive maid, thought her sister the paragon of womanhood. As she sat there watching the face that ever charmed her she said in her own mind, "France with her Paris, her boulevards, her forests and sunny plains would yield to worth and place her on her list of crowned beauties. Como's tide would recede that her silvery sand might receive the impress of the dainty foot, and her placid water reflect the form that

has no parallel."

"Iris," questioned Lois, "you look strangely this morning. What is it you have to tell me? Why do you stare at me with that perplexed mien?"

"Lois, if you would look at me a little more naturally, the mask would fall from my face and you would see me as I am. But I have something to tell you, sad news."

"It will not abridge matters to tamper with my patience by giving me a prologue to your only mission."

Iris, observing her sister's petulant mood, briefly detailed the accident. Lois remained calm, manifesting but little interest. There is no mind so subtle, so ingenious, as to have detected the turbulent emotion that swayed beneath the mingled look of complacency and bewilderment. Iris could not tell whether Lois' sympathy had been enlisted for the unfortunate or not; and she compassionately asked, "Don't you think it a very sad affair?"

"Yes;" was the monosyllabic reply.

"Lois, would you like to attend the funeral this evening? I met Mr. Allen in the hall and he said the exercises would be at 3 p. m."

Lois arose from her seat and went to the window that faced Elmwood, but did not look in that direction; her vision could not penetrate the clear pane of glass. A few seconds of silent meditation and she half impulsively turned to Iris; "Yes; I will go with you." Stooping to press her lips to the forehead of her sister, she added; "Now leave me; I will join you in the conservatory in an hour."

When Iris had closed the door behind her and passed down the hall, Lois threw her overtaxed body upon a divan and gave way to bitter weeping, open demonstration of a deep and lasting misery, grounded in the pangs of an unknown and secret grief. "Why should I be concerned? What is it to me?" she would say.

Her voice choked, her eyes became sightless and for a moment her brain lost its power; then she

thought, "What will become of me? Must I acknowledge to myself my love for another man than my husband? For two long years I've fought against this passion; for two long years I've carried this secret burden in my heart, for two long years I've striven with all the mastery of my soul to extinguish this mad, hopeless flame, and now, must I, another man's wife degrade self by this unholy confession? Bring dishonor, degeneracy upon the name that has ever been untrammelled with taint? Begone love? O! O! base, unholy passion, devised—a wretched, demoralizing something—for the prostitution and misery of all its victims; something unholy, ungodly in its nature, plebeian, contemptible and filthy in its origin; shrewd, artful and most ingenious in its persuasion; ruinous and most baneful in its consequences."

As she thus mused Norman Wellington's form arose before her, contrasted with that of her husband, but in personal bearing and superficial dignity, Mr. Allen was, to all appearance, Mr. Wellington's peer. Then she would say, "Why can I not love him?" But before the thought would mature, the two men's innate character and true elements of principle were contrasted. Mr. Wellington, like the bright and ever shining star of truth and perfection, was veiled in the glory of his goodness, while Mr. Allen only seemed as other men. Was this comparison and analysis a true one? It certainly was true. Then, must we condemn our heroine for these thoughts relative to the character of the two men? No; certainly not; they were the truth. Must we condemn and banish her from the pale of society for these meditations?

We have not gone to fiction's boundless realms and brought you an imaginary character, entirely faultless; but we have before us one of flesh and blood—a real one; one who from early life, prompted by strong religious convictions, touched by the finger of God, fell upon her knees each night in prayerful pleading to her maker. Reader, if you could have heard those soft lips offer the gentle, trusting petitions of her heart for the poor, the suffering and for

the welfare of all, if you could have seen her small white hands administer to the wants of the helpless, you would be slow to pass sentence upon her.

Could we open the carefully guarded doors of mind, enter the chambers of concealed thought, how many could we find whose goodness and magnanimity of purpose would exceed Lois Allen's. I dare say we would find none. In order to test the true value and merits of anything it must be subjected to certain analysis. So with human worth. The person who does not steal deserves no credit, if his circumstances have been those of affluence, and he has never been thrown in the way of temptation.

Lois had never known much happiness; but she had never known a grief like unto the grief that came with the dawning of love, though as yet she has scarcely tasted of the cup fate says she must drain to the bitter dregs. She possessed one of those poetical natures, combined with the wise inheritance of perspicaciousness and well neutralized intellects, that never tires in distilling admiration upon the genuinely beautiful and artistically designed. When the fetters were burst that had so long directed her uneventful life within the cold, formal restrictions of duty, her buried nature of love, of poetry, of romance leaped from the prison center of heart in response to the gentle but irresistible persuasiveness of the world's most absolute and unevading tyrant—love.

When she recognized the dawn of such an ill-timed and disgraceful love, her heart recoiled with burning shame, with bitter self-contempt, more nauseating and acrid to the purity of her mind than a draught of blood and wormwood to the palate. With a masterly effort, actuated, encouraged and quickened by the love of honor, the love of self and the inspiration of heaven, she suppressed the feeling; but no sooner had her heart regained its wonted quietude, than the bandaged flame dilated beyond the gates of control, invading every fibre and nook of her being.

"What is this subtle, searching flame of love,
That penetrates the breast unasked,
And blasts the heart of an adamant
As the quick lightning often calcines the blade
Of tempered steel, and leaves the sheath unhurt?"

When she fully ascertained her position, her feelings, and the unyielding sway of her love, she resolved that her misery, her sin, the secret cancer that would some day consume her life, should never be known outside the portals of her own soul; never would she indicate, by word or look, to a living mortal her shame. It was enough to confess it to God, who dealt gently with all. She would try to forget the noble image—noble to her heart—who had extracted unawares peace from her bosom. A thought of relief came with a quotation from Otway:

"If it be a hopeless love, use generous means
And lay a kinder beauty to the wound;
Take a new infection to the heart,
And the rank poison of the old will die."

Although she resolved to apply the remedy, could she? She said she would take her husband to her heart, she would see his virtues and crown them; his faults, she would tell herself he had none; and then the poison of the old infection would die. This proved but a momentary relief; in spite of her strong faith and Christian hopes she did not feel composed; a tinge of regret mingled with gall and sweetness oppressed her, one moment making life wretched and cheerless, the next eliminating the sad debris of consolation, and substituting hope and sweet longings, blended with the new and rarest of all pleasures; with the latter the gasped words of Lord Lyttleton trembled on her lips:

"But love can hope where reason would disdain."

Thus at the incipency of her new life, a life pregnant with the severest tests and convulsive with the sharpest pangs, she reasoned with self: until this June morning she had endeavored to execute every plan that promised to secure her safety from the fire within; but during the contest she could not learn to love Mr. Allen, and she was equally certain she could

never forget Mr. Wellington.

During her last musings the question had often arisen in her mind, "Did Mr. Wellington love her?" She knew she had no right to expect such, as she had no inherent or legal right, either, to bestow hers. This always mortified her. No special attention had ever been shown her by him; his bearing was ever courteous and gentlemanly, never betraying any feeling save respect. Often on her return from the city she encountered Mr. Wellington; this gave ample opportunity for the exchange of opinions on this subject; yet nothing passed to indicate the slightest clue to the warm and powerful attachment that had almost spontaneously ripened into love.

"Now his wife is dead. Will that knowledge react on my feelings to my advantage? Perhaps this will cause separation, and if so I may be able to forget him," she thought.

She remembered how a few moments ago she had condemned love and declared she would exclude it from her heart, but as her cogitations matured she began to recognize the true and unadvised state of her feelings. She felt the deep and mysterious power of the love in her heart; she knew it could not be resisted. "Yes," she acknowledged to herself, "*I love him!* There is no power short of the grave that can, for one moment, still my heart to quietude. As the sun from his unknown heights shines upon the earth and is the source of all vegetable life, so is my knightly prince to me. Ah! I do not love him of choice. My heart shrinks from such a love and its direful consequences. But,

'Love is not in our power.

Nay, what seems strange is not our choice;

We only love where fate ordained we should.'"

"O that I could recall the moment I ever met him; blot from memory its existence. But that is past now, and I must abide by a fixed decree."

When we feel the sting of guilt upon our souls there is a pleasure in the knowledge that it is confined to ourselves. Thus it was with Lois, though she did

not feel safe from the espionage of her sister. Only last evening Iris had spoken of her imprudence and marked attention to Mr. Wellington; however, she could readily put Iris to rest upon this subject, and then none but herself and heaven would know of the enormous, the secret sin of her heart; she felt safe with her God. He who had made and tempered nature must understand its capabilities and requirements. She knew it had not been her wish to love in shame; that she had done all in her power to smother the flame in its infancy; but it was too strong for her available means. If it was accounted a sin in the court of heaven, as in this world, then she was lost; her name eternally dishonored and the object of life unattained.

Though she was a strong believer in the New Testament requirements and the Mosaical commandments, yet upon careful and studied reflection the enormity of her sin seemed to diminish with the intensity of her love. The instinctive and innate factors of her existence seemed to hold, with strange and stubborn tenacity, that, if she alone was responsible for the inauspicious and ill-omened condition of her present, that it must be a cruel Father who moved in the splendor and omnipotence of heaven, imbuing each nature with specific and peculiar temperaments, susceptible to their utmost extent to the irresistible influences that yield death.

Her priest had taught her that God was gentle, full of love, merciful and kind; with these attributes of goodness forming His important constituents, she thought it incompatible with his nature to execute the requirements formulated into church creeds by biblical constructionists. Thus reasoning concerning God, she thought less of her sin.

Feeling safe within the arms of the tender shepherd, she arose from the divan, happier than when she buried her face in its velvet cushioned back. Softly she opened the door, with an airy noiselessness passed down the steps, through the long hall and into the dining room, where she had promised to join Iris.

CHAPTER V.

THE FUNERAL.

We must all die!

All leave ourselves, it matters not where, when,
Nor how, so we die well.

—Beaumont and Fletcher.

It was a glorious June morning that smiled upon the world; in its completeness seeming to consummate the end of all glory; portraying vividly to man that this world was made to honor God; whispering to him that man lived not unto himself but unto the Father.

Rosedale grounds never appeared more beauteous than now, seen under the caressing sunlight, while the soft, southern breeze stirred the foliage of tree and flower. The atmosphere was laden with fragrant, ambrosial exhalations from the rare and sweet-scented flowers; more especially the luxuriant banks of roses on every side gave forth the rich odor of Cashmere's vale. The summer houses that nestled here and there were covered with flowers, so deeply buried amidst the foliage their identity could hardly be established.

The stately beeches, the tall, slender pines and the majestic and slender elms met and interlaced their boughs shadily over the walk; the ivy-hidden fountains threw their limpid waters high into the air, until the glittering spray shone in the sunshine with diamond brilliancy.

One could not look upon Rosedale and its magnificent grounds without a thrill of admiration. Its broad terraced walks, its graceful trees, its drooping arbutus and golden arbor vitæ, its profusion of flowers and sparkling fountains. its matchless park, where trees of every known land that can be acclimated exist, all combine to render it the loveliest place in the state.

The morning went slowly and sluggishly to Lois. Mr. Allen, Iris and she had decided on going to the funeral. As had been the custom, the trio passed the

morning in the library, but this morning without the interchange of many ideas. Mr. Allen was absorbed in the morning paper; Iris was studiously engaged in reading Corinne, her heart replete with admiration for the girl whose rare qualities of intellect had crowned her at Italy's capitol. Lois was pretending to occupy her mind with Byron's Giaour, but her thoughts wandered far from the page her eyes mechanically read. Suddenly it returned and caught the words before her:

"The cypress droops to death,
Still sad when others' grief is fled,
The only constant mourner over the dead."

Then she thought of the bereaved husband, of the dead wife. She wondered how deeply Mr. Wellington lamented her death. Would his grief be like the drooping cypress—ever faithful—or would her place soon be filled by another? In her heart she hoped he would never marry again; nor, if her feelings, as they then were had been recorded, could there have been found much sorrow for Mr. Wellington's misfortune; for, as tender and sympathetic as her nature, the transport of love, born beneath a burning clime, where nature is steeped in constancy and fickleness relegated to colder climes, had tintured her being with a kind of selfishness that prospected upon a happy ending of a love that had such an unhappy beginning.

"Too early seen; unknown; and known too late!"

was her sad thought when some phenomenon of mind brought her pensive meditation to an abrupt close. Glancing around she beheld her husband sitting near the window, his head resting upon his hand, his eyes following the lines of an editorial article in the *American*.

The sun shone softly through the filmy curtain of silk and lace, throwing his shadowy light into Mr. Allen's face; now every feature of the rather sallow face stole from its hiding place of smiles and feigned good humored nature, revealing to the eye a physiog-

mony liable to severe criticism. Unconsciously Lois fully comprehended him in that look; though she would have read only the good depicted there, yet the draught received into her soul, though unknown to her, contained all the bad.

A silent, unknown and invisible messenger broke in upon her melancholy reverie and ushered her mind into the presence of a new and more abstract theme. As her eyes met the strange, complex and mysterious face of her husband, her heart exclaimed from the silent throne of its agony, "What is it to lay down the galling burden of life? to enter the endless realms of eternity? Could my soul rise from its unstable, mutable clay—above the feculent, turbid and fitful experiences of this world, and register its name in holy, indelible letters upon the pages of eternity!"

Here the trio were notified the carriage was waiting to take them to the funeral. Quickly rousing from her reverie, Lois was first to take her seat. Half an hour's drive brought them to the churchyard. The church, a spacious edifice with gothic roof, had stood for a number of years; around it were lordly forest trees and trailing vines.

Mr. Allen, Lois and Iris were late. The clergyman, whose silvery locks bore the touch of many winters, whose span of life had reached three score and five years, was extemporizing from the pulpit. Lois, unconscious of who she was or to what position she belonged, led by the strongest and most inexplicable anxiety, walked in advance of Mr. Allen. Without ascertaining what part of the house might suit them best, she marched to the front tier of pews.

Her eyes first dwelt upon Norman, seated near the sealed bier containing the mortal remains of his wife; his face was haggard, pale and worn; pity mingled with regret rendered his lips speechless and his heart grief-stricken. He never raised his eyes from the casket where his wife lay sleeping a sleep whose antidote is God's all powerful voice. In one moment after her death all past differences were forgotten; her faults no longer appeared against her;

her sudden and inopportune death brought reconciliation in the sense that all was forgiven.

As Norman went back over the history of their married life his heart filled with painful regret; he wished he could have been more affectionate and kind toward her; that he could have satisfied all the claims for happiness her life demanded. But he thought: "What are these vain regrets? They cannot ameliorate or make life better. This is but the passing through nature's different states. All that lives must die. Death is pendant over life's pathway, and will, sooner or later, seize us all. Why succumb to grief against the inevitable? Farewell, dear wife, you have gone and left me. You were called by the stern voice of fate; without a warning tone you crossed the river, without one good-bye.

"If I have been careless and indifferent to your wants in this life, it has not been my own will or desire. My nature is, I feel, naturally kind and desirous to make those happy around me. If I have to your pure and noble soul seemed avaricious and mercenary it has not been by any voluntary will of my own free agency. Whatever you may have seen in me to deplore, I pray your angel spirit, before condemning too bitterly, to analyze what may have been my secrets and with what force they may have moulded and governed my life. As I leave these holy walls, and reluctantly retire from your newly made grave, I go to mingle with the world in its unmasked attitude. I feel that my business life has about closed, not closed because you are gone, for I had it in contemplation before now. Stronger forces and a more sovereign momentum are moving upon my life; its swaying every fibre of my being; though I cannot read the mystic page held just over the border of the present, I realize fully that it is fraught with much interest to me. Will I be able to meet its requirements as a true man? Now that I am wholly alone—the last link broken—what will my life be? I shrink from my own selfishness as thus viewed. You, my darling, are now free; no troubles press your joyous brow."

With these parting thoughts for his wife, he endeavored to let his thoughts keep pace with the discourse; though he looked upon the funeral service as nonsense and irrational, he generally respected the Christian religion with its benign and civilizing influences. His mind was poisoned and infected with materialistic dogmas; yet he confessed a belief in a Deity; but, like most skeptics, he was fickle and wavering upon this point. One day he would be a professed pantheist, while the following day he would be courting the theory of Mirabeau and Voltaire. He said the plan of salvation revealed in the New Testament was too intricate and incomprehensible for him to rationally believe. He had heard great and good men affirm—though constant work in the ministry had brought them near the grave—that doubts would often arise in their minds as to whether they had preached the truth; and his opinions were formed accordingly.

If after man has lived a life of devotion to the cause of Christianity, and nothing tangible enough has been found to completely divest the heart of every doubt, he felt sure, with his strongly fortified infidel feeling, that he could never place his trust and transfer his confidence to anything so groundless, so incomprehensible as the belief in a Messiah. Although as he sat there meditating upon this subject, the form of a beautiful, trusting girl rose before him, thrilling to life all the admiration of his heart, in electrifying from their normal state the earliest impressions made upon his mind; yet his heart remained unthawed, untouched.

The pastor announced for his text: "O death, where now thy sting! O hades, where now thy victory!" Looking long and anxiously over the little audience, he repeated his text with deep and pathetic solemnity. His discourse was brief but appropriate. No beautifully rounded sentences or graceful eloquence touched or played upon the feelings of his hearers; but the gospel light and effect seemed to flash from every word, carrying deep conviction to

the heart. He referred to the sad cause of the present service, but thanked God that death had lost its pang, and that the grave claims upon victory had been frustrated by the death of One, who voluntarily shed His blood that the world might be saved, and the Prince of the power of the air subjugated.

He extended the warmest sympathy to the young husband in his early bereavement, but assured him that "all things work together for good to them that love the Lord;" and, though the shroud of melancholy veiled cheerfulness from his heart, that he must not submit to grief. In the language of the king of poets :

"'Tis unmanly;
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
An understanding simple and unschooled."

But that, when his power and prayer had failed to bring relief, he should submit as cheerfully as did David when death took his beloved son.

To Norman came these words of King David: "Farewell, 'tis hard to give thee up." His heart took up their sad refrain and he listlessly followed their dying echo until his mind left, as it were, its dreary habitation and trod the unknown; he heard not the consoling lines the preacher was giving in the words of the poet,

"He covered up his face and bowed himself
A moment on his child, then giving him
A look of melting tenderness, he clasped
His hands convulsively, as if in prayer;
And, as if strength were given him of God,
He rose up calmly and composed the pall
Firmly and decently—and left him there—
As if his rest had been a breathing sleep."

After vividly portraying the glories of heaven—the Christian's home—he directed his thoughts to the mortality of the body and the immortality of the soul. Upon this subject he said "that man must live beyond this life; there was nothing material or tangible in the world that could be subjected to complete annihilation; inanimate nature was imbued with eternal

existence; a chip, lifeless and incapable of action, could not be destroyed; its form may change and to all appearance be completely exterminated from the realms of existence; but the sage and philosopher tell us nothing can be lost in nature; then is the human soul of less value than wood? the human mind of less value than the clay in which it dwells? Virgil wrote centuries ago. Though his body has crumbled to dust beneath the soft skies of Italy, his writings are as fresh and forcible as the day they were written; then is it just to say that the mind that gave birth and existence to ideas that have immortalized his name among men, perished as his material body passed away? Can the less contain the greater? His thoughts, his ideas, the result of his labors live to influence and win admiration for the ancient poet; but is it rational to say his mind—the power that gave us his writings—does not exist? And all that remains of the gifted Virgil are the few extracts of his writings that now can be found in our libraries!" He said "that he would take God's revelation to man from the discussion and prove there was a God, that man was an immortal soul, that his life in a future state would be as he had moulded it in this."

Here his eyes dwelt on Norman, the good old man knew the depraved condition of his heart. Norman heeded not his divine christian philosophy; his soul slept on in stubborn indifference.

The services closed with a warm and fervent prayer, then the bier was removed to the church-yard where a fresh dug grave received it.

"The grave, dread thing! Men shiver when thou art named, nature, appalled, shakes off her wonted firmness."

Could Alice Wellington have looked into the cold, cheerless grave, that had been prepared to receive her body, she would not have been affrighted, or stood speechless upon its sad brink; for to her it was but the receptacle of a soulless, spiritless body; boding no dreaded encounters, early in life she renounced the world and trusted her soul in its infantile purity to

Jesus. Beyond the grave, high on the hills of immortality, she had prepared herself to live in peace and luxury, bathed in the splendor and delightful temperature of Heaven. Her trust was perfect, entire, her life ever conformed to her faith; now, freed from its tenement of clay, her soul reposed in the presence of Him, whose voice led her through the turbulent scenes of earth. Heaven, oh, most comprehensive word to the soul was attained by her, if Heaven is to be gained by mortal.

"Immortality o'er sleeps
All pains, all fears, all time, all tears, and peals
Like the eternal thunders of the deep,
Into my ears this truth, 'Thou livest forever.'"

CHAPTER VI.

NORMAN WELLINGTON AT ROSEDALE.

Alas what stay is there in human state
Or who can shun inevitable fate?
The doom was written, the decree was past
Ere the foundations of the world were cast.

—Dryden.

A short time after Norman had seen his wife laid away in her last resting place, he disposed of his business interest in the city, and re-invested his money in stocks and bonds. After this he returned to his quiet, country cottage intending to live a retired, secluded life. The first few months of his seclusion he saw no one except the servants. Time passed by on golden wings, as sorrow threw her mantle over his face—for he seemed to find perfect contentment in solitude. But, alas! this blissful reign of peace, of the deliverance of human life from its real purposes, motives, and painful experiences—as all things earthly do—must yield its crown to whom the fates have ordained; thus he was again thrown out upon the shifting ocean of life exposed to all its breakers and perils.

Autumn had superseded summer, and was almost verging into gloomy winter, when a card, bearing the name "Richard Allen," was handed him.

"Show the gentleman into the reception room, I will come down presently," was his dismissal to the servant.

Without giving a thought to the cause of the wealthy banker and proprietor of Rosedale's visit, he proceeded to the reception room.

Mr. Allen had just seated himself in a large rocking chair near the window that opened on the pike, when Norman entered. He arose, gracefully held out his hand, saying, "I am glad to see you. I trust the shadow of your bereavement has passed away by this time, and that you will soon feel cheerful enough to seek your old haunts again.

Norman smiled sadly as he replied: "Many thanks for your kind wishes and the pleasant surprise of seeing you this morning, but I do not think I shall ever again go in business."

"You do not mean that, certainly, Mr. Wellington. Why, for a man of your youth, capabilities and energy, to retire to private life, would be to sacrifice your self for naught. If you would but accept some one of the various opportunities at all times open to men of your capacity, it would not be long until your present grief would vanish as a summer cloud. We cannot live without seeing those we love cut down by the harvester—death. It is as natural to die as it is to live. Death is essential to life; we live only to die. You, as well as I, realize fully that death must come; it is inevitable. Then why succumb to grief; rather rise above it and live in the present."

"Is it better to grasp the chain of life or one of its links? Shall we acknowledge the past, the present, and the future or simply endeavor to enjoy the present? Such a view to my mind is narrow—"

Mr. Allen moving impatiently and without giving Norman time to reply further, interrupted: "Have you been here during the whole time since

your wife's death? I have missed you in the city, but have been pressed with so many cares I did not make any inquiries about you."

Norman, a little astonished that his banker and immediate neighbor should have occasion to ask such a question, said; "Yes; I have been here since I closed out my business."

"You don't think of remaining here," rejoined Mr. Allen.

"I have nothing else in view now," he answered.

Norman Wellington could have told Mr. Allen that he was mistaken as to the cause of his present seclusion and sorrow, but acting under the proverbial sayings of Solomon he "held his tongue," while all the tender feelings of his noble, yet human nature aroused in regret for the *contretemps* that took his wife from this world, and if it had been possible to have called her back to his side he would have done so. He felt if that part of his life, in which she was his companion, could be lived over again he would devote more of his time to her happiness; but there was no deep, longing regret, no aching void in his heart, that another could not supply.

Mr. Allen hesitated a moment before continuing the conversation, looking doubtfully into Norman's face, as if trying to fathom some mystery or read his thoughts. He began, "you will doubtless think me presumptuous when you have heard the import of this morning's mission, yet I hope you will attribute all to my confidence in your sagacious business tact."

Here he paused, then said: "For some time I have been contemplating a visit to the West India Islands, but my home affairs were such that I had to postpone its execution for a more favorable time. My plans are to go now and remain during the winter; but, before going I want to employ some one, whom I know is reliable, to give his personal supervision to some important matters during my absence. As the business would not detain you in the city during the night, I thought perhaps you would give it your attention

until my return." This last was uttered in a questioning tone.

The dreamy expression cleared away from Norman's face; it lighted with seeming interest under the influence of Mr. Allen's remarks. "What did the rich banker mean by this demonstration of confidence," was the question he propounded to himself before offering to reply. "Mr. Allen," he began, in a tone implying hesitancy and discomposure, "I feel very grateful for the trust, whatever it may be, you would confer upon me; but I had thought I would never go out into the business world again. I came here to remain forever, feeling that I would be happier here than any where else; but, during the last few days, my feelings on this subject have undergone a change; so, if by giving you a few months of my time, I can be of service to you I will consider your proposition."

"I feel that if you take advantage of the opportunity proposed, you will not only have respite from your grief, but you will soon hold it in subjection. As I before stated, my business is not of that nature to confine you in the city at night; and as Mrs. Allen and Miss Iris will be at Rosedale they would appreciate the relief from loneliness which your companionship would supply."

At the mention of those two names Norman's face brightened still more, as he involuntarily said, "Gratification only smiles upon those who feel they have done their duty. It has always been my highest aim to perform with exactness the requirements imposed upon me; so if I accept this trust, which I promise to do provided my skill will admit of it, you may rest assured that I will do all in my power to promote your interest and sustain your business in its present status, during your absence. I think I would enjoy spending my evenings here, yet if my gloomy presence will impart one ray of cheerfulness to your family, I will remain at Rosedale."

It was noon when Norman and Richard Allen separated. Before leaving, Mr. Allen gave his new

business manager in minute detail, the responsibilities he would leave with him; closing the conversation by saying:

"I will leave this evening. Come over and see me off."

Norman thanked him with the promise that he would do so. It was late that afternoon when Norman closed the gate behind him on his way to Rosedale. The soft autumnal breeze, murmuring the funeral song of day, the sad requiem of over-flying birds and the withered leaves falling from the stately trees, seeking graves in the yet green grass, filled his heart with depression; he was almost sorry he had given his consent to leave Elnwood. Once he turned and looked back upon the lonely cottage he was leaving; but remembering his promise he firmly continued his way, determining in his own mind to forget the unhappy state of his feelings.

Soon he entered the gate that opened on the handsome grounds he had so often admired. Looking up at the elegant mansion which confronted him, he was surprised to see the carriage standing ready to bear Mr. Allen to the train. He quickened his step, hoping to reach the house before his employer left the drawing room; but just as he was in the act of ascending the broad stone steps, the hall door opened disclosing Mr. Allen, Lois and Iris. Instantly he drew back to meet them on the walk.

"Not true to promise, but late," spoke Mr. Allen as he came opposite Norman.

Raising his hat to the ladies, Norman apologetically said: "I was not aware you would start quite so early, or I would have come sooner; however I am happy to be here thus near your departure."

The banker taking hold of his friend's arm, they walked in advance leaving the ladies to follow alone. When the carriage was reached, he turned to Norman and the ladies and said: "My time is limited and necessity will force me away without further conversation unless you can go with me to the station."

"The trio gave a unanimous consent; for the first

part of the distance Mr. Allen advised Norman concerning the business he was leaving in his charge, after which he gave his attention to Lois and Iris. At the close of the journey he left his wife and Iris in Mr. Wellington's care; addressing Norman he said: "I may not return until April, perhaps later. During my absence, Mrs. Allen and Iris will be lonely with no other attendants except servants, and as you need the society of congenial associates to mitigate your grief, I suggest that you make your home at Rosedale during the gloomy hours of winter."

Norman, thinking perhaps Lois or Iris would reply, hesitated before answering. But as they were painfully silent, he said: "If my presence at Rosedale will not be objectionable to Mrs. Allen and Miss Earle, I will not reconsider my promise of this morning, but will desert Elmwood, with its quiet influences, and find pleasure in giving your family such services as will be appreciated."

Lois, turning her soft, dark eyes upon Norman, answered for both. "Thank you, Mr. Wellington, we appreciate your kind consideration for us, and in return promise to make you cheerful to the extent of our morose natures."

Iris did not speak, she kept her eyes fixed upon her sister's face, noting its paleness and the breathless interest it indicated in the conversation. A strange, dreadful foreboding pressed painfully upon her heart. What it was she did not know; but a mysterious relation existing between the human mind and future events told her that all was not well—that Norman Wellington should never become an inmate of Rosedale—that his presence would bring heinous sorrow, if not disgrace.

Their journey was ended; the carriage stood at the station just in time to make connection with the south-bound train. Hurriedly the good-byes were said and he made his exit. There was no trace of feeling in his farewell words; his eyes were as cold and his face as stoical in expression as though those he was leaving were utmost strangers. The three

watched him as he forced his way through the surging crowd that thronged the passage way, until his form was no longer distinguishable from others. The coachman waited for the departure of the train that bore his master away, before reining his horses homeward.

An almost silent drive was theirs. In vain Norman attempted to draw Iris out of the dream-like cloud that enveloped her; every effort was futile. Her prophetic mind dwelt in the future; though the mystical hieroglyphics fate held before her eyes were incomprehensible to her pure mind, she felt their shadow and shrank from their realization.

Several weeks have passed since Mr. Allen's departure; things have moved smoothly at Rosedale. On this evening, tea had been served in the conservatory. Having partaken of the nerve-resting beverage the trio were in the library discussing the events of the day, when the postman arrived from the station. There was a letter or two for Iris, an evening paper for Mr. Wellington, and a number of letters for Mr. Allen, which were handed to Lois. She hurriedly glanced over the postmarks and addresses, as rapidly giving them to Norman, until she came to the last one.

It bore a foreign seal. Something in the irregular but delicately executed chirography excited her attention and interest; looking around at Iris and Mr. Wellington to see if they had observed the hesitating, momentary view with which she considered the dubious postmark—observing their attention chained to matters of their own, she clipped the envelope with a pair of small silver scissors, that lay near her on an oval table inlaid with richest marble. Its contents disclosed in her lap, the thought involuntarily rushed to her mind, "This was not her letter; it was addressed to her husband. Was she doing right to read it in his absence? Would it not be more like conforming to the strictest rules of integrity to keep her eyes from its contents?"

But overcome by sheer curiosity, she suddenly

unfolded it. The writing was plain and neatly executed? it was evidently the impress of a lady's hand. Looking upon the last page of the strange missive for a signature, she involuntarily read,

"Once Yours,

ANNA MARTIN."

Agitated almost beyond self-government, she thrust it into a small hand-pocket, designing to take it to her room. Raising the soft eyes that a few moments since were so abstract and absent in their pale glow, now animated with the keenest interest, and annoyed with an intimidation which, when the doubts and mystery of its birth were removed, would lend an impetus to the consuming fire of chagrin and dire astonishment destined to add a double and secret sorrow to an already shadowed life, she marked the attitude and expression of her companions. Satisfied that her actions had passed unobserved, she affected an interest in one of George Eliot's novels. The book rested in her white, jeweled hands; her eyes were fixed upon its pages, but there was a mechanical stare about them that betrayed the mind's wanderings.

She had not long kept up this counterfeit concern, when Iris observed to Mr. Wellington, "Sister Lois is certainly oblivious to the existence of real, substantial beings in her presence, or her finer sensibilities would remind her of one of the primary rules of politeness."

"Perhaps her investigation now is but a continuation of a theme she laid aside when last in the library. Then you must know I am to make my home at Rosedale, and shall not expect any formal attention," added Norman.

At the sound of Norman's voice Lois looked up half smiling; attempting to appear pleasant, she closed her book and said, "As I had no invitation to participate in your engagements, I thought to entertain myself with a chapter in *Romola* until you had read your mail. You know selfishness frequently supercedes politeness."

"Why, Lois, did you not get a letter?," ejaculated Iris.

Norman noticing, without divining its meaning, the deep flush that, like an electric flash, mounted to her cheek, covered her confusion by asking, "Have you never read Romola?"

"No, sir," breathed Lois, "but I have read other books by the same authoress."

Norman, not wishing the conversation to close, again enquired, "Do you like her as a delineator of character?"

Forgetting her excitement, she began to be much interested in the direct questions Norman successively submitted to her. "I am not very familiar with her writings; perhaps not enough to venture an opinion; but to the extent of my acquaintance she has but few equals in literature. Sir Walter Scott has written *Kenilworth*, rich with descriptions of antiquated courts and castles; but George Eliot has *Adam Bede*, pregnant with delineation of character. Dickens has even exaggerated the worst deformities of life; Thackeray has made improbabilities become the expectation of all; and a host of lesser lights in the galaxy of literary aspiration have divine heroes and heroines whose deeds are but the spark of honor, and whose lives are but the reflex of incarnate nature. Not so with George Eliot; she has taken man and his helpmate, woman, clothed in their garb of flesh just as they were exiled from the lost garden, rendering to them a life that corresponds with the controlling circumstances of this, eliminating from her books faultless heroines without a real counterpart."

"Lois, how fickle you are! When we read *Adam Bede* together you expressed indignant disapprobation of it," exclaimed Iris.

"I think you do me quite an injustice, Iris. Christian and pagan philosophers have mutually agreed upon evolution. This unavoidably suggests a primary, intermediate and advanced stage in the development of intellectual material; change in sympathy with advanced thought does not propose capri-

ciousness; but it is simply a confirmation of the declaration that the world, and all that is in it, was not made in one day. To be orthodox you must not believe that the universe is in the iron grasp of inflexible laws. Then, why not accede to its inhabitants the free rights of speech? When we read Adam Bede I was young, both in years and experience. Since that time my mind has matured with a more extended observation, and I am disposed neither to exaggerate nor conceal facts, but upon every question of ethics to accept what is rationally true."

"Sister, I confess my mind is not charged with a sufficient quantity of combustible material to explode your philosophy; but, be it as it may, fickleness seems to me the only appropriate name for these antipodal opinions." Turning to Mr. Wellington she added, "I hope your incisive comprehension of metaphysics will not be too fully exercised at my stupidity."

"Perhaps you are both right; you in your candor, Mrs. Allen in her philosophy."

"Mr. Wellington, you are too direct. I shall declare immediate war with you," rejoined Iris.

"Will it be a war of physical strength? If so, I am ready to consider terms of reconciliation. But if it is to be a fray of mental ingenuity, I will implore Mrs. Allen's aid, feeling assured she will give you an opportunity for the exhaustive application of your mental efficacy."

Lois laughingly said, "I shall be at your service."

Iris, feeling a slight tincture of annoyance at the combination, rejoined, before Norman had time to express his thanks to Lois, "In either combat I am sure I would gallantly receive your swords; but for the present I declare a truce."

The clock was just striking ten when Norman bade the ladies adieu. He walked softly up the long, winding stairs; when he reached his room a cheerful fire burned in the grate. Its warm glow was not reflected in his soul; he felt sad, lonely and wearied; sad, because his heart had been touched with an omen

bearing on its sails much unhappiness ; lonely, because he had found a true mate to his heart ; one whose soul, in all its complexity of mechanism, corresponded to the divine light of his own being, a companion in all the import of that word ; but O ! what an insurmountable obstacle between them ! what a dark chasm rolled between—over which there was no passage except to launch his vessel on the muddy, fetid sea, where none ever sail but whose insignia is *sin*, SIN, SIN ; wearied, because across his life was written, “Here sorrow has her crown, sin her sceptre,” defying happiness ; “Come thou not this way.”

Throwing himself into a plain rocking chair that had been drawn near the fire, he sat for a few moments in solitary, profound study. Presently he folded his hands across his breast and began to move restlessly across the room, meditating ; “O, had I never consented to come to this place, where the trees, the fountains, and the atmosphere are laden with her perfume. Lois Allen, you have awakened a heart from its dreamless slumber, and administered a tonic whose perpetual influence will rival that of light and heat. Fair bird, the heart that thou hast so gently awoke can never sleep more. I cannot go away now ; I shall remain to discharge the demands of the old banker’s business. But as soon as my time expires I will go away, never again to return to these enchanting scenes.”

Had Norman Wellington known the future, with its vast train of innumerable sorrows and conflicts consequent upon his remaining one day longer at Rosedale, he would not have waited the rising of another sun, but would have rushed madly, wildly away. Incumbered with the ignorance of finite discretion—impressed with the moral conviction of logically complying with the letter of his promise, without considering the subtle influence of love—impressed with the potency of his own volition, and trusting to the permanency of a resolution based upon human integrity, he, unfortunately, without meditation, without decision, wove his own destiny.

The following morning Norman rose early and went out for a stroll. He hoped the pure morning air, crisp with the breath of coming winter, would refresh body and mind from the lassitude produced by the sleepless night. It was a lovely morning; the sun was pouring his rays of light in exuberant splendor and warmth, as if to impart new life to the withering vegetation that had blighted under the mild October frost. Entranced by the final tragedy of dying night, and by serious meditation over thoughts suggested by the falling leaves, he unconsciously prolonged his wanderings beyond his original intention. When he retraced his steps in rapid movement the sun had noiselessly climbed far above the stately beeches, lavishing his lustrous rays in profuse cheerfulness.

As he entered the gate that enclosed him within Rosedale premises all was still but the bubbling fountain, that sent up its silvery sprays into the morning stillness, glistening like diamonds in the sunlight. As he paused to steep his soul in admiration, he descried a faultless figure reposing upon a rustic seat beneath the spreading boughs of a superb magnolia, attired in a morning robe of exquisite taste. In her hand she held a cluster of heliotrope and apple geranium leaves, inhaling their delicate fragrance. It was Lois. Before he could obey the injunction of his will a soft, melodious voice recognized him with a salutation few men could resist. "Come," spoke Lois, "and enjoy some of the morning freshness of the exquisite charms that linger about this enchanted spot."

"Thank you, Mrs. Allen, I am rarely ever complimented so highly."

"Your concession confers a pleasure never tendered before," she responded as he came to occupy the seat near her. Laughingly she continued, "But do not let my flattery disseminate seeds of egotism, for my rest was disturbed last night. I am now trying to get up a reaction."

"It seems the night carried us through a similar experience; and you are now out on the same mission

as I—seeking the beauties of the morning to dispel the oppressing thoughts of the night,” responded Norman.

Lois’ face paled as she retrospectively considered the past few years of her life; though a sad smile cut its shadow about her mouth, there was no semblance of it in her voice as she replied: “Great ships plough deep waters; probably the coincidence is owing to some invisible similarity pertaining to the undercurrent of our nature.” Recklessly her thoughts fell from her lips; had not her face falsified her heart, the eager listener would have entered its sacred precincts.

“Oh, Mrs. Allen, give me the keys which will unlock the vaults in which are treasured human thoughts, and I will show you something similar in every human manifestation. We all have impressions made by flowers, sorrow, nature, love, and the beautiful, which we cannot express, that have a corresponding likeness.”

Interruptingly Lois asked: “Mr. Wellington, you like very much to act as presiding judge upon weighty matters? Your discrimination between error and truth upon the finest points in polemics admirably qualify you for the position.”

This sudden change in the theme discussed completely mystified Norman. He almost felt her words were devoid of truth and replete with irony. Yet he smiled as he said: “State your case, and I will render a verdict while in the attitude of fasting.”

“Have I been so thoughtlessly cruel as to detain you from breakfast? Come, I will serve you myself.”

“A rich compensation for waiting, and I am sure my breakfast will be doubly appreciated, but let us not forget the proposition you have to submit to me,” he reminded.

“Do not laugh when I submit my grievances, for while they may seem very insignificant to you, they are still a part of myself. To night there is to be an entertainment at the Masonic theatre. Iris and I have had an altercation about the expediency of go-

ing. I want to go; Iris declines. I will abide your decision."

"What is the subject of the play?" inquired Norman.

"Lady of Lyons," responded Lois.

"A story of love and pride," involuntarily exclaimed Norman. Looking down into the lustrous eyes and rose tinted face all aglow with queenly beauty, he asked with questioned propriety, "Have you either?"

When Christ said to Nicodemus, "Art thou a teacher of Israel, and understandest these things not?" he did not confuse the Jewish doctor more than Norman Wellington perplexed his auditress as the self-interpreting text implied, "Art thou a woman and understandest not these things?"

With wonderful equanimity, she promptly met the question: "The *pride* but not the *love*," fell in quick, decided tones upon his ear.

Jestingly laughed Norman; "I don't think any lady's vocabulary complete without both. Suppose we go." Lois gave a ready consent.

The evening was spent in the usual way; reading and conversation consumed most of the trio's time when Mr. Wellington was with them. To day his work had not called him to the city.

To day had recorded the awakening of Norman's soul from its dreamy stupor of mercenary motives; a world, ripe with beauty, entertaining in social reparation, and inviting to a tired merchant just emerging from the commercial whirl-pools, lay in panoramic display before him.

All the evening the words, "The pride, but not the love," in mysterious notes, in wonderful, sublime sweetness, were sung to his heart. A soft, musical voice would whisper from some lost zephyr—"love—love, thou canst conquer pride." Along the bounding lines of his soul, a thrill of bliss, blended with sweetness divine, would pass, pause, and like dew, distill until the heart was submerged with ineffable rapture.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE THEATRE.

“Love has no thought of self—

Love buys not with ruthless usurer's gold,

The loathsome prostitution of a hand without a heart.

—Lord Lytton.

The sun had just buried himself in the brassy rim that belted the west, the soft twilight was unfolding its velvet mantle for a short sway, when the handsomely equipped carriage appeared at the gate. Norman, Lois and Iris—Iris had been forced to yield through love for her sister—were waiting in the hall, admiring some quaint old pictures under the changing light of the dying day.

At the noise of wheels they simultaneously moved towards the entrance; soon they were reclining amid the luxurious cushions of the carriage. The groom, having reined the graceful roan steeds until they almost danced in their silver and gold glittering harness, now whispered, hissing, “Go;” swiftly the carriage rolled away.

As they passed Elmwood, Norman's eyes involuntarily wandered across the field to where Alice peacefully slept in the frigid, apathetic arm of death; his eyes filled with unshed tears as his heart stirred in sympathy for his poor, dead wife. He thought (probably for the first time in life) that if there was a heaven he would like to meet her there; he was sure, if there was such a place in the realms of the universe she was there; and as he looked out through the crystal windows into the dull, leaden eastern sky, relieved now and then by the faint glimmer of a rising star, he wondered what she was doing in that city of disembodied spirits, and if her eyes were wandering from their home of shimmering emeralds and pearls, into the dust and grief lined ways of earth.

“To night are her seraphic eyes following me,” was his irrepressible thought. “No; he could not believe the dead possessed an interest in the living; such

a monstrous doctrine was the legitimate child of the twin sisters—superstition and ignorance. Human life is entire, complete; there is no continuation of wrecked and blighted aims in an unseen world,—located by some ambitious and visionary astronomers at the center of the universe.” These reflections came to Norman all in a moment; they entered his soul by the mysterious influences of the past, and flashed across his mind by the electrical recurrences of unforgotten periods in his history.

The fading twilight concealed the powerful contending emotions that contracted and expanded the linaments of his face, from Lois and Iris. But opposite to him, a pair of soft dark eyes, with dove like innocence, paneled into a face of alabaster whiteness of Venus type, that reclined half ensconced on a creamy pillow, beheld a glistening tear as it rolled down the unfurrowed cheek where grief had but few traces. Lois did not speak; tired of the long silence, her lips in another moment, would have framed words calling for a reply; now she closed her eyes in half smothered and forbidden curiosity to know the meaning of that tear; she was not mistaken—the veil of dusky eye was not too thick for her not to discern the form and character of an ordinary manifestation; she was certain it was a tear.

The last vestige of day was gone ere they arrived in the city; but being too early for the entertainment they proposed to enjoy the intervening time in loitering along the most fashionable streets. Iris was convivial, congenial and social; Lois tender, reticent and prudent. As they slowly passed from one thoroughfare to another they changed the subject of conversation often, treating upon each with flippant indifference.

When for the fourth time they paused opposite the Masonic it was 8 o'clock; the music from a well drilled band came up through the amphitheatre and down the large hall-way, reaching the ears of all who passed the door. With hearts enraptured in anticipation of sublime experiences, they entered, passing

along the aisle of the parquette until they were ushered into their private box.

Many eyes turned upon them in questioning gaze. Many who had passed them on the street unnoticed, now adjusted their opera glasses to recognize them. The music from the orchestra had ceased; the vast sea of faces sat in silent expectation. Iris was studying the picture of an old castle by the sea that decorated the curtain; she imagined she could see the waves whirling and tossing in their fury, and she was certain there was the rock-hewn steps leading from the water's edge into the castle; there was the wild, forest-covered bluff in the background. So well executed was the work of the artist her mind almost conceived the shadow as the substance.

Lois was seated at her side with her eyes placed in studious intentness upon her face. Lois never wearied admiring Iris; she fully comprehended her life in its lofty purity and sacrifice of self; though she knew her face was like her sister's, she knew also that it did not mirror a soul as spotless.

Norman sat in front of them, with his face half hidden in the folds of a curtain which gracefully draped the column against which he leaned; thoughts of the past had vanished from his mind. The music that had just ceased, nor the artistic display of his environments held him; but the two faces before him chained his soul in a transport of study. History, nature, nor artistic ingenuity has not bequeathed to man a subject so admirably adapted to his consideration as a woman's face, beneath which the soul dies, animates, surges and exhausts until each emotion is reproduced in a facial expression. Here human history epitomizes itself; here nature's sternest laws are enacted, and here is executed the law that advances civilization and purifies society, also the law that makes man a suicidal brute and prostitutes society's safeguards; here emotions pass along the magnetic current of human impulse which blights hope, and here flash aspirations by which the plastic

soul is fitted for life in one of the beautiful cottages of heaven.

Norman, so absorbed in the marvelous exactness of the two faces, was totally oblivious to the scenes around him. Suddenly the thought pierced his mind that he was free to marry again; his wife had been dead two years, and a companion, bearing the holy name, wife, would do much to dispel the gloom that was settling over him. But whom would he seek to bear his name? His eyes were fixed upon Lois; then came the sad, bitter thought, she was already a wife. That he loved her as he never could or had loved another, he confessed to himself, but he would never breathe the fatal secret, he would keep a watch over his actions and withhold all the fond attention he desired to show her. Then Iris flashed across his mind, and he wondered why he did not think of her first. She was not married, and no possible sin could blight the promise to love her. She was the exact, the perfect image of her sister; no one who knew them was able to distinguish them through natural or external means.

Their most intimate acquaintances, beginning with Mr. Allen, down through housekeeper, servants, and ending with the amazed stranger, were alike often perplexed as they unconsciously reproduced the Comedy of Errors. Norman reasoned that if he loved Lois he could love Iris also; there was no plausible, tangible reason why he could not.

Though Norman Wellington prided himself upon the logical cast of his mind, he was often erratic. While he was a very close student of human nature, he was after all very inaccurate. When he resolved to transfer the forbidden love he had unintentionally acknowledged for Lois, he little thought of his inability to do so; he did not know that love was a principle, an eternal reason of divine origin and application—not a mere emotion—the result of culture, association, resolve, or volition. Had he have stayed the hasty decision one moment to have questioned: "How mysteriously have I been fascinated by Lois; since

that first morning I saw her, I have loved her. . . She half unburies a past," he would have known it was the soul, not the face, that seeks its kindred spirit even here.

Norman was aroused to a sense of reality by a voice from the stage. Adjusting himself to a posture of convenience, he discovered a scene of dramatic effect and interest, and in the artistic arrangement of the drawing-room furniture a display of studied and inborn taste.

The scene was in Madam Dechappelle's house. Pauline was reclining on a sofa, Marian fanning her. An exquisite bouquet of hothouse flowers, luxuriant in fragrance, was on a table beside her.

Lois whispered to Norman, "Mr. Wellington, I believe you told me you were familiar with the drama?"

Norman bowed an assent.

She continued: "You must prompt me if I fail to get the idea intended to be reproduced."

Norman smiled as he modulated his voice to hers. "I am sure that I will be very much pleased to assist you to a thorough comprehension and appreciation; but I understand that each actor will sustain his role with that skill and natural genius which never fails to captivate."

"How beautiful she is!" exclaimed Iris.

"A wealthy French nobleman, of royal blood, on suppliant knees entreats the daughter of a tradesman for her hand," added Lois.

"She rejects him," reflected Norman.

"There is honor—even a burning principle of self-respect—in the low-born. No name to sell; but an honor that cannot be purchased with sordid wealth," passionately interposed Iris.

"Hush, sister. You are too Utopian; not practical enough," ejaculated Lois.

But in Lois Allen's heart there was a dreadful question which she had never answered. Once she was a poor girl, destitute of the royalty wealth brings—nothing except her beauty. • A man came to her

with money ; an illusive fancy filled her soul. She imagined she loved him, and in her innocent girlhood, being over persuaded it was woman's highest aim to marry, she became the miserable wife of Richard Allen.

Tonight these thoughts rushed into her mind as they had never done before. Once she almost breathed in an audible whisper : "I would have been happier not to have come here tonight. All that I have seen sears upon the soiled sheet of conscience a deeper regret for my mistake—a sad awakening that pours down upon my head the follies and mistakes of a misappropriated life. The chimerical illusion, the glamour of love, the magnetic influence that always heralds a man of wealth and position into favor, have flown, leaving not a trace of my first fancy. What have I before me now ! Nothing but a living death. A life to live burdened with intolerable duty—a life to live in which the dew of happiness is cut off by a wall as high as heaven."

"See," said Iris, "how inexpressibly mean is man. Artful, scheming brute ! I hope poverty will yet vindicate itself. No ; yes ; Melnote yields and the plot is consummated against defenseless Pauline."

"No," said Norman, thinking of what would yet come. "Melnote is not a total reprobate ; he will right the wrong and unfold his colors to a good end."

"Better end well with a bad beginning than end badly with a good beginning," suggested Lois.

"Ah, ha !" laughed Iris ; "The prince, all grace and suavity, acts his new role to perfection. A real prince of St. Petersburg would not be more at home. Listen ; hear him describe his palace on lake Como."

"A palace lifting to eternal summer
Its marble walls from glassy bower
Of costliest foliage, musical, with birds
Whose songs should syllable thy name !
At noon sit beneath the arching vines and wonder
Why earth could be unhappy, while the heavens
Still left us youth and love. We'd read no books
That were not tales of love—that we might smile
To think how poorly eloquence of words

Translate the poetry of hearts like ours.
And when night came amidst the breathless heavens
We'd guess what star would become our home
When love becomes immortal! While the perfumed light
Stole through the mist of alabaster lamps,
And every air was heavy with sighs
Of orange groves, and music from sweet lutes,
And murmurs of low fountains that gush forth
In the midst of roses. Dost thou like the picture?"

"Ingeniously acted," remarked Norman.

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Lois, "Does she love him?"

"Listen," he continues:

"Oh, as the bee upon the flower, I hang
Upon the honey of thy eloquent tongue!
Am I not blest? And if I love too wildly?
Who would not love one like thee, Pauline?"

Lois threw herself back into the seat she had almost deserted. All animation dying out of her face, she whispered in breathless exhaustion, "Mr. Wellington, I am tired; I cannot wait for the last act. Let us go home." There was a strange, smothered light in her eyes—a pale, weary sadness about her lips that told the too oft repeated story of over-excitement.

Melnote's next words touched not the souls of Lois and Mr. Wellington. Though Norman's eyes were apparently fixed on Lois' face, he saw it not, nor heard her wailing cry. The misty waters of the past dashed in mountain waves o'er him, bearing on their bosom the shadowy remembrance of his boyhood that ever perplexed his mind; now, as ever, he tried to fathom the panoramic view, and snatch the connecting link by which he might, as it were, unfold the future.

Thus held, he saw not the pallor creep over Lois' face as her silken lashes drooped low on her pearly cheeks. The muscles and lineaments of her face remained passive, while there was not a trace of the Etnian fire that consumed her mind, nor of the forbidden selfishness that burned within, threatening to burst the barriers of pride and self-respect, in order to

gratify the reckless yearnings of this unholy and passionate love. With impatient doubts and hesitancy, she was standing on the dividing line—a perilous expanse where few women ever go and retrace their steps—between a wife's honor and a wife's shame. A touch of Iris' hand recalled her from this abyss of desperation just as Melnote stepped upon the stage and cried out: "Conscience! Conscience! It must not be." The words fell upon her debating heart like a death sentence. "*No, it must not be,*" she thought as she made a personal application. "I must bear and suppress it all in the locked vaults of memory. Ah, my soul! Woman's virtue, too lofty, too divine for desecration. No, never! This shameful thralldom must cease."

"O, horrors!" shrieked her soul in the voice of a dying conscience; "why did I ever—ever confess that I loved him? If I had but crushed this consuming fire in the remote moment of its birth, when it was but a glimmering spark on the confines of mental vision, I would never have stood on the verge of eternal ignominy, with no power but the still, small voice of a sorrowful and bleeding conscience to turn my feet aside."

All the love and heart-enrapturing scenes of the night played around her in ecstatic beauty. The star-embroidered sky of night seemed to shine down through the frescoed walls, lending its wild charms to soften the glaring gaslight, and doubling the longing of her spirit to flee from turmoil here and mix with their eternal rays. She could not remain; were the ordeal faced longer, her poor heart must succumb to its emotions.

As they took their departure, many were interested to know why they left so early. A drama so interesting as *Lady of Lyons*, and its rendition by the present support, was certainly beyond criticism. Truly this was a perplexing question to those who watched the trio make their exit.

What a grand thing it is that man is so constituted that, when his feelings are drawn to their high-

est tension, and when the gulf of human endurance is swept over by a cyclone of distress and disgraceful records, his history is all his own. No eager eyes can invade the sanctuary of his soul and read his secrets without his consent. So it was on this eventful night in the history of Lois Allen; she bore her burden home, a sealed volume of despair, clasped with pride.

Iris and Norman participated in an eager conversation, as they were swiftly carried back to Rosedale, but Lois was very taciturn. She had almost lost the power of speech when she gave her companions a willing farewell for the night. Quickly she locked herself in the privacy of her apartment; for one flitting moment she felt the last charm of life had vanished and the fervid hue of passion paled to death on the lovely cheeks. On imagination's electric yacht she sailed out into the ærial ocean. When the sable curtains of night rolled back, paling the shining constellations into azure blue, she anchored her vessel in mid ocean—a human life in circular motion, rolled in turbulent, tempestuous whirlpools around her—out on the confines of imagination's remotest vision a rim of gold bound together tranquil sea and blue sky. This she interpreted to be a happy winter, but long before her eyes viewed these prophetic emblems of peace, there were signs foreboding an irrevocable fate.

Maddened billows, foaming from every crest, pierced the black, storm infuriated clouds that thundered a sympathizing howl for every surging groan of the wild sea; but through their billowy peaks, the gold-glittering band and placid sea was ever seen beyond.

Had not some beneficent transitory influence stilled the nerves, appeased the aching bosom, and peacefully reposed the frenzied mind, all would have ended here with Lois Allen; but God willed it otherwise. Under some unaccountable phenomena of mind and spirit, the past, present and future are associated into a typical sea, while the imagination, conditioned to the highest tension of moral excitement, coerced into the illogical realms of the mind by the exhaus-

tion of the body, is placed in the center of this metaphorical sea of symbols in such a way that the impressions conveyed through its channels were so assimilated into the heart as to elude all future attempts of philosophy and common sense.

Lois lay for perhaps an hour in this unconscious state, wrapped in the mesmeric power of this most wonderful vision. As she lay with her hands folded in deathlike position across her still, throbbless bosom, with the index of life asleep in her exquisitely molded wrists, to all earthly voices and intents she was dead. This was but a temporary respite from life's harassing battles; the god of death administered a mild antidote to life, while the god of Peter dissociated imagination and mentality from its sister faculties and placed it in the midst of a wonderful revelation. As soon as the detached organ of the brain returned to its fountain, the unseen God retreated, and life, like an electric current, moved over the tranquil dead. A rosy tint flushed her cheeks, her eyes opened in wild amazement as she arose to a graceful, sitting posture.

A deep, low, impassioned cry passed over her lips as imagination flashed her eloquence across the disc of the brain, arousing the sleeping faculties of superstition in the soul until the whole physical, intellectual and moral exponent of her nature were wrapt in awe at the panorama of this marvelous vision. "Where have I been?" leaped from every expression of her face. No word in the vocabulary of her intelligence could give a solution to that question. It was destined to be the one unfathomable problem of her life.

Many times in after days the brittle cord was almost clipped, but she would see the gold-embroidered horizon and stay her hand. Life came back to her like a rushing torrent, fraught with the whole train of its former sorrows. The body, nor the mind, had not lost or gained anything during that sabbatical period. The scenes at the theater were all fresh; the imperishable love—burning like a mad, immortal fire—was

still in her heart; the soft, warm pressure of Mr. Wellington's hand still thrilled her; the velvet kiss that Iris dropped like dew on her lips as she bade her good-night, was still there. In her heart there was still that contrition for having gone to the entertainment. The full, flexible and impassioned voice of the stage, as it came to her laden with the fresh dew of love, effected a personal application, which set to love's music the whole volume of her heart. Beausant's rejection by Pauline suggested the cause and consequence of her marriage; this she applied to herself, laboring to believe that all women were better than she was.

A thousand times during the night the question presented itself, why did she ever marry? She must certainly have loved Mr. Allen then; she would think so and try to love him again. "Where was he to-night?" she questioned. "Will he ever come back to see his unhappy wife?" Walking across the room to where a life-size picture of her husband hung, she bowed—a kneeling figure of pity; giving away to sobs of weeping, her heart burst out into a wild, fervent prayer: "O, God, have mercy, I implore Thee, upon a lone woman with a heart steeped in sin and her feet turned from heaven. Thou knowest, O, Great I AM, that when I pledged my hand and heart in marriage, I meant to be ever loyal and true. O, now, I pray Thee, lift my heart out from under the regency of sin, and give it to my husband. I want to love—I want to adore him. I have not yet committed any overt act of sin in word or deed. O, then, am I not chaste enough for my husband's love? O, Thou God, who didst pass through the fiery furnace unharmed, come, walk with me in this conscience furnace of fire, and send Thy counteracting influence to bind me back to the precious joys of a sinless life! O, Richard; thou whom I have called 'darling husband,' return unto me, and I will seek in faithful prayer the ability from God to love you.

"O, God, with heart as pure as human will can make it, in all the earnestness and sincerity of my

volitionary nature, I plead with Thee, believing in Thee only as a wretched, dejected, self-condemned woman can. O, Father, there is a principle alive in my soul, I know not what to call it. It asserts itself to be the sweetest breath of heaven; until a few years ago, until proper conditions arose, it was a latent, unconscious power; now, Father of mercies, is this one of the divine seeds sown in the human soul by supreme wisdom; that when quickened by the mysterious process of induction, there is no appointed death for it short of the grave; if such is true, O, God, I feel that my only hope is in Thee. Thou holdest the key to every human heart; wilt Thou not rob me of this new life? Come, veiled in Thy spirit, and remove that attribute of my being where love can only live. Save me, my Father, from self; uphold my feeble body along the weary pathway, and enable me to endure my cross."

As the last words died away on the midnight stillness, she arose from her prayerful attitude. When the handsome costume was carelessly taken from her body, she, insensible to everything else except her misery, fell asleep in a shroud of gloom and distress.

Could we walk with Lois Allen through this night's dreams and spasmodic cries of "*horrors!*" "*horrors!*" "*death!*" "*death!*" we might learn something of remorse and misery in their relapsed forms. Lois was a good, noble woman at heart, as her sufferings proved. God does not afflict any but the purest examples of woman's excellency with such sore chastisements. Only the heart of acute sensibility and well defined honor ever receives God's voice of reproof with so much penitence. Lois Allen's nature had been, until now, woven into threads of purest kindness that she deemed loveliness. She was the embodiment of all that was commanding and noble; she possessed a few faults, but considering her intentions and will, her moral record was without the pale of comment.

After all, she was in a measure like all her sex; she had a soul that yearned for pure happiness; a heart

warm and ever beating with the tenderest emotions ; but it was no part of her inherent disposition to sacrifice one of those honor ties of womanly modesty and chastity to reach that goal. Reader, unless you have been humiliated by that worst of tyrants, love, you can lend no sympathy to our heroine. Her heart is inflamed with a passion that yours has never felt. Her love, apart from all the impurities of an epicurean attachment stronger than law, stronger than volition, exempt from selfishness, reigns, the monarch of a heaven-born fate.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANCIL RANCH.

Search not to find what lies too deeply hid;
Nor to know things, whose knowledge is forbid.
—Denham.

It grieves me to the soul
To see how man submits to man's control;
How o'erpowered and shackled minds are led
In vulgar tracks, and to submission bred.

—Crabbe.

In one of the civilized counties of Texas, forty or fifty miles west of Waco, stands a wooden building a half century old. It is surrounded on the west and south by a dense forest ; on the north and east by a beautiful expanse of prairie ; a few yards from its door is a bubbling spring that, rising out of the ground, furnishes the head waters of Coryell Creek ; a few miles west, over some hills and infant mountains, is the beautiful Leon river, rushing forward to the Brazos, forgetting this bubbling spring, its fountain source. A farm and a pasture of a few acres, enclosed by a dilapidated fence, lie north of the house. East, a half mile out into the level prairie, are a group of excellent corrals, built in order to control the vast herds of stock which belong to the ranch.

Let us go back to the old house, where our attraction is for the present. Horses in full rig for travel are hitched to the numerous trees which belong to the outer grounds. In the yard men are clustered together in coarse, vulgar conversation; some with Mexican hats in their hands, others with them fastened lightly on their heads by means of a leather string passed around the back of their necks.

Some were standing against posts and trees; some sitting on rocks or anything they could appropriate to the use of a chair; others were lying flat on the ground enjoying the cool, eastern breeze. These men make their headquarters at the old house; when they speak of "home," this is the place to which they refer.

This would be no novel view at the border ranches of Texas, to-day; but the place where the events of this chapter occurred is now surrounded by the highest evidences of civilization. There are but few traces of its past scenes.

Leaving the "boys" to give their pistols and bowies a chamois polish, we step over the four rail fence and enter the hard beaten path that leads us into the almost desolate house. Lying on a scaffold bed, in one corner of the room, was an old man whose hoary head and furrowed cheeks bear the impress of age and weakness. He appeared to be a man of medium height, though not strongly built; his face was rather handsome and striking in appearance, but as he opened the phlegmatic gray eyes an expression of distress, weariness and disappointment flashed over his face, a puzzled, dazed, wondering was all you could see in his mien that was notable. His hands, locked in each other, hung across his breast.

There seemed to be a verse lost in memory, the finding of which was necessary to resuscitate the mind to its normal state of health and vigor. A long, flowing, frosty beard coursed its way upon his breast, and covered the lower features of his face, leaving nothing but the straight, ample nose, the rather prominent cheeks, and the high perpendicular forehead open to full observation.

By his side sat a middle-aged man, compactly proportioned, his face, haggard and worn in expression, was covered with a curly, thin beard. The normal reflection of his countenance was veiled by a famishing conscience that yearned in a voice as strong as the inherent impulse to do right, for a drop of pardoning water to gush from the fountain of justice, and immerse it into that quietness where peace of life would repose in the security of the laws of approval. A hungry index of the heart caricatured his physiognomy into a concise history of the Titanic power of hopeless repentance over a life fraught with crime, that nothing but the blast of memory can obliterate.

His head was bowed over the half insensible man as if in prayerful communion with heaven. Suddenly he threw himself back into his chair, as if his heart was about to be consumed by the cancer-eating agony of suspense, exclaiming interrogatively:

"How long since Ike went away? I am perplexed to know the occasion of his continued absence."

Ed Loraine (the prostrate man at his side) unlocked his hands, threw them up as if he would clasp a support to his feeble body, then, despairingly turning his face toward the speaker, asked:

"What did you say, Fred?"

"Oh, nothing, Uncle Ed. Only Ike's movements are a profound mystery to me."

"Have you heard nothing from him yet?" questioned the listless sufferer.

"No; nothing in a year. You know he said, when he went away, that he would be gone for some time; business would probably call him to Europe before his return."

Fred Russell paused a moment; he was on the verge of uttering an unkind word against his confederate, in the presence of the much wronged and deluded man. A horror seized him, and he decided to never reveal a page of the sealed book of crime that had long been a sore burden upon his conscience.

Before these thoughts of the past were banished from his mind, Edmond Loraine again questioned:

"Have the 'boys' all gone out? I want to talk with you on subjects of great privacy and concern."

Fred arose and stepped to the door; the "boys" were all on their horses, ready for their evening round up. They had divided into companies of four, and now rode away without observing the keen, restless eyes of their employer watching them from the door, these wild cow-boys loved—as much as in their nature was possible—this man for his unassuming grace, and the impartiality with which he managed them.

Those who were assigned to the east engaged in the following conversation. One said:

"Bill Shroud has been jailed for hooking too many of Widow Green's yearlings."

Another added: "I guess it will learn him a lesson. The laws have changed in Texas since I've been on the range. I gad! when I came to these parts five years ago, if a feller had a brand he could get all the mavricks in Hamilton county, if he was sharp enough. Never heard of the law squealing on him. All he had to fear was some man's six-shooter, whose calf he had yanked."

The third put in, as he gave his rather unruly horse a stroke with his riding whip:

"The boys will get him out; the lawyers in Hamilton say all law is unconstitutional that binds a man down to his own ranch. See how they conjured the jury, so it said Tom Jones and Nick Brown had the best right to all unbranded colts over one year old found running with their bunch of horses."

The fourth, a native Texan, fires in with his crude ideas of justice:

"The opinion I got down into my head is that Bill Shroud is a pop-gun kind of a fellow; thinks himself the biggest man in these diggings. Maybe a rest in the jail will cool him down; but I don't see how the law is going to say how many cattle he ought to have to his part. If they have cuffed him because his brand was found on somebody else's calf, how are they going to prove the design; that's the word, boys;

the law looks at the intention of the matter and not the act without its common sense view."

Boasting in his knowledge of law and justice, he yet gloried in the downfall of humanity; swore that he had as soon swim in blood and drink human gore for coffee, as to sleep on feathers, and drink old Lincoln County "how come you so;" rejoiced that he was a son of the Wild West, and knew no fear.

Thus talking, they passed from view.

* * * * *

Fred stood watching the disappearing men for several minutes, before he returned to the bedside to say :

"Their ears are beyond the reach of our voices. What is it you want to speak about, Uncle Ed?"

The old gentleman opened his steel grey eyes and fixed them calmly upon Russell, as he said :

"We have been here about twenty years now. Yourself and all this stock, numbering thousands upon thousands, belong to Ike Ancil. He has not been here a month during the whole time. There is something inexplicably strange in his conduct."

"What you verbally state is true, uncle; but let us not give it an inferential interpretation. You know there are no charms in this uncivilized land for Ike. Here society's refining influence does not reach; these enchanting scenes, in the midst of nature's solitude, sing rest only to the recluse. I know but little by experience of the fascinating influences of eastern society; my poverty and general status forbid my admission into high life; however, I have drunk the dregs which have settled from its exhilarating effects. I know some of the ruins and moral wrecks that are now the sad but living monuments of its alluring music and its fatal consequence. There are but few men of Ike Ancil's wealth; for you know he holds Cræsus in his left hand, and Fortuna in his right.

- Power—and money is power—wrecks the finer sensibilities that are interwoven into humanity and delivers the captivated soul over to its captor. Ike is not a man of the highest inborn loveliness of character."

A powerful tremor swept swiftly over him as he continued: "Ike is susceptible to a great many suggestions which come from impure motives. He is inclined to instability and there is some incertitude attending all his promises."

Ed Loraine listened with pricked ears to every word which passed over Fred Russell's lips. Though Fred had been very attentive to him in his illness and patient in all his helplessness, though he showed the respect to call him "uncle," no kindred tie bound their souls together.

The strong intuitive powers of man told him Fred Russell was living a double, wicked and disguised life; yet these impressions failed to tell how he had become a wicked man, or to what extent he now repented; he was forced to believe, against the persistent opposition of his will, that Fred knew more of Ike Ancil's past history than any living man, and that he knew more than he had or ever would divulge.

"Fred," replied Mr. Loraine, "why do men come to this country to live? My mind frequently goes back to that old home among the rocks and mountains of Virginia. There I was surrounded by a handsome library and my daily paper was brought to me each day. I was an interested observer of the political sky. I loved religion and the prattle of young and tender childhood. Fred, in those days, you were a different man; instead of the gaunt, distressed look that now hangs upon your face, like a shadow, you were a genial, festive youth, prepossessing in appearance, a devotee to pure and instructive literature. It is all, *all* an unfathomable mystery to me. Since I awoke from my dream, I have never asked for an explanation for the change that has come over us and all nature—a spell profound."

The old man's voice, at first full with excitement, grew into a mad, despairing cry, that touched every cord of Fred Russell's heart. Never had he felt the keen sting of remorse so painfully as now.

He had fought many battles with his own con-

science, and the question resolved itself down to Hamlet's soliloquy :

"To be, or not to be?"

But the cowardly sleep came over him, and he arrested the drawn dagger, as Cato's words burst in thundering eloquence from the voice within :

"The soul secure in her existence smiles
At the drawn dagger and defies its point."

But now another was puzzled and harassed over the plain and undeniable irregularities in his life, and for which he must shoulder the responsibility.

"O, remorse!" shouted the monitor within, "Cerebus, roll back the sombre curtains of hell! Charon, leave thy oars to freedom's hand that some infernal convict may escape to earth on a mission of sympathy!"

Humanity never experienced greater self-condemnation than she witnessed in this poor, sin-cursed, yet penitent man. Too good to commit a murder now, and too long in the employment of vice to renounce its sceptre—to confess its damning and fiendish influence—and, if within the pale of possibility, turn imprisoned justice loose to devour her prey, even though life should be the forfeit. It requires irreversible decision, self-sacrificing and unrelenting firmness to recast the soul after it has been steeped in the foulest and blackest crime, involving the consummate overthrow of character, reputation, and the ultimate ostracism of the individual.

But the hardened sinner who had borne these battles, in a degree, for over a score of years, was not destined to surrender just yet.

Taking Ed Loraine's hand in his he said :

"Uncle, you may have been iniquitously treated, and I could tell you something which would astonish and enrage you; but, I think it would be very imprudent in me to detail to you a history of what occurred during your long illness. In the future, at an opportune time, I will tell why I am here with you. I love you most of all men, may be termed the prime reason

of my presence here. The condition and origin of this love I cannot now tell you. I have plenty of money at my control to establish myself in easy, enviable circumstances; but I shall never leave you while you live. By my deference to your age, attention to your wants, and tenderness in caring for you, I hope to ever share the greatest proportion of your love."

The emaciated and decrepit form was fast succumbing to the declension of age; he did not fully grasp all Fred said to him; yet he understood enough to know that it would not be best for him to learn all his own history now. Though he felt a stupor coming over him, he replied to the imperfect idea he drew from Fred's avowed friendship:

"Fred, you have been as kind to me as a son; if it had not been for you, my spirit before now would have been wandering in some other world. While this kindness, in a measure, abates my physical suffering, it renders my mental none the less intolerable. My mind seems to be clearer in the last few days than it has been since I lost my health."

Here he paused as if trying to supply the lost link of memory, then dreamily continued:

"During some of my recent meditations, the question is often asked, 'where is my little niece?' You remember her, Fred. She had long, black hair, sweet gazelle eyes and silken lashes; she loved me so much. She was standing at my bedside, when I closed my eyes in that fevered sleep from which I have never recovered. Fred, you were awake all the time. Did you help to bury her, and where was her last resting place? You have plenty of money at your control, promise that you will take me home and lay me by her side, when death comes."

Fred wiped blinding tears from his eyes, as he attempted to satisfy Mr. Loraine with an ambiguous answer. Giving his hand a gentle pressure, he said:

"Uncle Ed, you have suffered yourself to become too much excited this evening. You hazard your life every time you yield to the charms which these buried

hopes sway over you. I remember the little girl all too well; she loved you with all the fervor of her childish admiration. "Yes;" he seemed to almost give way to his feelings, but recovering instantly, he continued, "I assisted at her funeral exercises. Go to sleep now; when you are refreshed, I will come again."

"No, no! do not leave me now," insisted the old man. "Your conversation has proven cheering and exhilarating to me—the finest antidote for comatose I have had served me. How are the herds getting along? Does the natural increase of the stock balance the sale of beef cattle?"

Fred, being glad to shift the conversation into a different channel, answered with promptness and interest;

"I am very much pleased for having made myself instrumental in dispelling some of your gloomy thoughts. Our cattle are in an excellent condition this winter. The frost has been light, and the range is yet very fine. The natural increase has been greater than the sales, and I would not be surprised to find the excess several thousand."

"That will be very interesting news to Ike," whispered Mr. Loraine. "But is he as avaricious now as he was in his youth?"

"Uncle, I think you have lost much of your old wit," smiled Fred. "Why, don't you remember Thomas Decker says:

"When all sins are old in us
And go upon crutches, covetousness
Does but then lie in her cradle."

"Ah! Fred, you turn leaves in the book of memory I thought had been torn out. I vividly see it all now. It was a poet's dream. Dr. Johnson said:

"The lust of gold was
The last corruption of degenerate man;"
and was it not Blair who wrote the verse—

"O, cursed love of gold; when for thy sake
The fool throws up his interest in both worlds;
First starved in this, then damned in that to come."

Continuing, Mr. Loraine said: "By verse we prove that avarice is the last sin a man gives up, but I think poets dream and do not philosophize."

Fred, looking at the old man, astonished at the almost miraculous change that had come upon him, thoughtfully replied:

"I lay down the postulate, that all poetry is not truth; but it does not follow that there is no truth in poetry. Ike may have lost some of his old love for gold, but it is hardly probable that he has lost enough of it to say he is not susceptible to its seductive influence."

"Ah, Fred," returned the old man. "if your heart was as good as your logic, you need never have been here, a fugitive from justice." Noticing a sudden contraction of feature, he explained: "Fred, don't take exceptions. I had not heard a jest in so long, and as these words just forced themselves on me I uttered them. Yes, with all wise men I say: 'Vice is the last of man's associates he takes leave of when he goes away from earth.'"

Here his mind drifted back to the original topic, and he questioned:

"Fred, what do you say to me catechising Ike about my presence here, when he comes? Do you think it will be advisable?"

"Uncle, I am rejoiced to see you so much improved in strength and mental vigor; but I am afraid you are going to give so much thought to a past that is irremediable as to incur a relapse. If I knew your health permitted, I would like for you to confer with Ike upon the subject of the past; but I do not now think it would be expedient for you. I am afraid the information obtained would not be definite enough for your satisfaction. He is the one man who can favor you with a detailed account of all the past, but I am confident he will never make you wiser than now. An interview with him will only mystify and becloud your mind into a labyrinth of phantasms. I hope you will ponder well what I say without an effort to divine the secondary cause of my actions."

"Fred," in all deference to your views," frankly responded Mr. Loraine, "I cannot keep my silence always. My suspense, my anxiety, my suspicions of foul play, urge upon me with an impetuosity which my frail nature cannot resist. I know as well as though your words had told me, that my questions have greatly nonplussed and distressed you to-day; but I look upon you as being my only benefactor in my helplessness, and will not pain you any more with personal questions. You may be a vile reprobate, incorrigible to good influences; if so, death will soon deliver your spirit over to the Furies, who will see that 'your measure is meted out to you again.' If Ike Ancil returns before the restoration of my spirit to its eternal rest, I am going to make some direct inquiries about the past. There is a short history which he knows that justice demands he shall not withhold from me.

"Can I, restrained by cowardice, let him gently go without even an accusation? No; Ed Loraine is himself again; he wants to liberate the just.

"The Gods
Grow angry with your patience;
'Tis their care,
And must be yours, that guilty men escape not."

"Do not think, Fred, that I am mad this evening. I have had my thoughts collected for several weeks, but thinking it useless, I have not expressed them. If you have work to do, I can manage the remainder of the day alone."

Fred Russell's face had lost none of its deathly wanness during the conversation, and his heart bled with new wounds. Hitherto he had felt that Ike Ancil was the only living person who knew the moral turpitude of his heart; but now the only man in whose welfare and comfort he was concerned, had inadvertently thrown into his teeth that he was a disguised hypocrite.

Unable to reply to Mr. Loraine, he sauntered away, at his half command, out into the vast level prairie, dotted with sheep, cattle and horses.

Reader, do you want to gaze for a moment upon a mausoleum of regret, a wrecked and self-loathed existence? If you do, behold Fred Russell! All that eloquent pens have written, and all that men have said on pinions of sublimest oratory, sink into a bagatelle when called upon to portray this man's sufferings. His life stranded bark floated out upon a tempestuous sea, crushed into a hopeless pile of human debris.

With no father, brother, or sister to counteract his self-incriminated, hapless, and ill-fated destiny—no mother, with face aglow with love and tenderness, to come and twine her arms around his neck and offer her prayerful sympathy—no mother to stand by him in his disgrace, to uphold him while the world turned and spit its vilest opprobrium upon him—no wife to kneel at his side, a monument of devotion, when conscience had thrown asunder the fetters of pride and become his most vociferous accuser—he was the most forlorn, pitiable wreck in the ghastly, bottomless courts of misery.

Sunk in his own bitter thoughts, this lone wanderer did not turn to retrace his steps until the sun was hiding himself behind the hills and forests that belted the western limits in picturesque beauty. Earth had donned her most enchanting December costume; but her melodious voice sung not the cheerful notes that could rock the disconsolate heart in restful slumber.

The clashing thunder and howl of the midnight storm cannot drown the voice of an indignant conscience; nor can the funeral anthems of sunset, sung by nature's soft, flexible voice, allure it into illusive dreams of approaching rest.

It was dark when Fred Russell reached the house. He had walked for several miles, but did not feel any fatigue; he was totally unconscious of the cool breeze that had chilled his body almost to numbness. As he approached the house his attention was called by a cheerful fire that cast a brilliant light over the room and out into the fast increasing darkness.

He stepped over the low fence and had reached the steps that entered the room, when he beheld in speechless astonishment a familiar figure, dressed in elegant attire.

It was Ike Ancil.

CHAPTER IX.

AT ROSEDALE.

Alas, what stay is there in human nature,
Or who can shun inevitable fate?
The doom was written, the decree was past,
Ere the foundations of the world were cast.

—Dryden.

Away to heaven, respective lenity,
And fire-eyed fury be my conduct now.

—Shakespeare.

The dreary, cold winter with its sombre hues and lugubrious skies, had been superseded by spring. The queen month has appeared above the horizon, strewing her flowers on the lap of earth.

During the months that have passed since Mr. Allen's departure to the South, many a hard fought battle has been conducted in the silent chambers of the heart by at least two of Rosedale's inmates; and yet that little emperor, known as self, is still unconquered. Human nature at Rosedale remains the same.

Norman has been the recipient of one letter from Mr. Allen, stating he would probably be at home in March. The postmark was indistinct and his address was left out. March had come and gone, but Mr. Allen was not at home. He had written once or twice to Lois, but for some unknown reason he always suppressed his address and refrained from making any reference to the time when he would get home.

These eccentricities and strange phenomena that recorded themselves in the history of Richard Allen were the subject of much private meditation; how-

ever, Lois had resolved to bear this form of her burden alone. Her husband's neglect was by no means the source of her keenest misery, though she did not like to confess it. At times spontaneous impulse would suggest that she might be happier if he never came back. This thought occasioned conflicts between will and love.

She clamored for mastery over self in many ways; sometimes on the suppliant knee of prayer, and again in the secret council hall of duty. Much of her time during the seven or eight months preceding were dreamed away in study and conversation with Norman Wellington; each day her adoring heart imbibed fresh fragrance from his presence. She learned to trust him, not by test or any merit his past conduct warranted, but by the talismanic power which threaded her soul into a harp of harmonious music.

During these days of sweet association her heart went out to him in full confidence; if she wanted anything to satisfy a momentary whim, she did not hesitate to ask him to have it brought to her. While she never mentioned her husband's name or referred to his protracted absence, she had no other trial but she confided it to him. Her heart had become oblivious to the first sting of conscience; as her reason became revolutionized, she saw no impropriety in her association with Norman, and enjoying his congenial companionship so long as their intimacy was confined to the limits of friendship.

She had philosophized over it until she believed love was but the highest order of friendship with the dross and impurities that mingle with ordinary attachments cancelled. Thus she reasoned, and thus she justified every step taken, evading, in a degree, the warning which faintly echoed upon her heart to be answered by love's ingenious arguments, expunging even the mildest type of sin from the conscience, and leaving the mind in the most delightful state of complacency. She never stopped to inquire how far this attachment had progressed, or if she could relinquish it at her will.

The future—the unknown future, which she must pass through before death, was not a momentous theme at this period of her life. The religious—the predominating element in her nature—was neglected as her present happiness became so overwhelming in its fascinating sway. Her mind in its pleasing quietude never once thought to tell Norman of the sunshine he had brought into her life. No, horrors! she could not tell him; it was not that kind of love, anyway. It was love such as the flowers would speak to him—the soft, evening breeze, laden with the fragrance of roses and heliotropes, would whisper it to him at sunset by the fountain; there would be no sin in that—the news would be so sweet.

To a disinterested witness Lois will be severely condemned for her conduct, and by law and testimony ostracized from chaste and cultured society. Unjust judge! know ye not that man cannot be judged by his belief? Sincerity, absolute sincerity, is the highest test of honesty and virtue; circumstances, regardless of what may be said of it as a falsity, is the generating and determining power of belief.

Belief assimilated into the soul as the religious and moral germ of conscience decides the right or wrong of every important step to be taken in life. This belief is not always dependent upon what we hear or see, but upon what we feel as the result of external influence over the intellectual and sentimental sensibilities of our inherent natures. Therefore, before a man can speak inflexible, irreversible edicts against a poor, frail woman, he should be put in her place, surrounded by all the soul-fascinating circumstances that had perverted her belief into a channel of thinking which makes a deed or act admissible when it is the realization of idealistic hope.

We have all seen persons whom we have deified; so long as our minds remained in this happy condition in reference to them, their faults were transformed into virtues and received our unstinted praise. A man who has no faults in the eyes of the people can rule them, form their opinions, and speak their

sentiments by the word of his mouth; he can lead them into rebellion and treason, and utterly wreck their cherished hopes and character. This is the power of man's influence over a nation.

Who from the shrines of justice and honesty will walk out upon the pulpit of reason and condemn the deluded, though sincere, hearts who have participated in their own suicide? Their acts alone, and not the actors, remain for criticism and just condemnation. Human acts do not always exhibit the state of the heart. A man may be associated in a very dark crime, while the intention of his heart is right. In such a case, where does the verdict rest? Where is the culpable party? Oh, ecclesiastical philosopher, answer: "Most emphatically upon the undesigning heart from which came the acts which resulted in the sin." Wise theology, where do you say? "Upon the party who committed the act regardless of motive or design."

Sympathizing Christianity, where do you say? "The intention of man always decides, fixes his state in our society. The fundamental principle of our union is, that the heart is the fountain of good and evil. All good must proceed from the heart, likewise all evil. Every evil thought comes from the heart; thought or design, then, either criminales or exculpates the soul.

"Humanity is the field in which we work; hence our system was prepared to meet its wants. We have peace to offer those who are pure in heart, but gall for those whose hearts are poisoned with insincerity and malicious designs. Lois Allen is a member of our order—an unfortunate woman placed under circumstances that have bought her conscience and perverted her reason, but who can question her sincerity, or have the iron heart to say she does not believe she is listening to the still, small voice within. Her conduct is the source of much pain and meets with our severest criticism; but we cannot condemn the woman who believes she is right, and cannot, when aided by that divine pilot, conscience, behold anything inconsistent in what she is doing.

"One of our beatitudes is: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' So far as we know of Lois, her mind and heart still repose in the safety of conscious purity, and we believe the everlasting love of creator for creature, will, after she has served an apprenticeship of suffering in the bondage of sin, lead her back over the dead sea of wasted opportunities into the holy ground of Christian example, where she will remain to await in serene safety the sunset of life."

* * * * *

One mismated marriage lived is better than a thousand divorces, but how many wretched men and women turn from the funeral ashes of their own vows and seek relief in the courts; many of them good women, even tempered and forbearing, are tied to brutes for husbands, and many men, industrious and agreeable in disposition, are linked by the indissoluble bonds of wedlock to fiendish and hellish women. We have in the history of Lois an illustration that congeniality and compatibility of temperament are the only sacred links in the mystical chain that bind "two hearts into one." Nor do we believe that coercion, by the prohibition of divorce, will preserve the sanctity of marriage, for infidelity will follow as a natural sequence when the impassioned and disquieted nature seeks respite from its painful bondage.

* * * * *

Not only have Norman Wellington and Lois Allen seen this winter go by on time's fleetest wings, but Iris has attracted the attention of Raymond Humphrey, a rising young lawyer. Of course, being a woman, this sudden stimulus to her vanity gave to the dreary winter the flush and soft colors of a May sunset; flowers bloomed beneath icicles and butterflies sported in gleeful merriment out in the falling sleet, so great was the transformation wrought in this prosaical woman.

Raymond Humphrey was thirty years of age; in bearing, gracefully tall and handsomely proportioned; courtly and prepossessing in manners; with

eyes breathing poetic fire and passion, his suggestive names were Paris or Apollo. He was a hopeless devotee to society, until he knew Iris Earle.

There were no Capulets or Montagues to disturb this modern Romeo or imprison the lovely Juliet. Raymond tacitly withdrew himself from the throng that assembled in the brilliant parlors and halls for festive entertainment, as his acquaintance ripened with Iris. Many public and private comments were made on his strange, sudden retirement from the social ring where he was the favorite of every debutante.

The wealth of Nashville, attainable through marriage, was accessible to him; but he was not the man to sell his hand and prostitute his heart. Raymond Humphrey had a higher conception of life than to barter away principle to obtain physical and temporal security; however, he is nothing but a man fraught with all the infirmities and susceptibilities of his race.

We might portray him as faultless, the absolute embodiment of all that is commendable, to the exclusion of all that is weak; but why look out upon imagination's illimitable domain, away from the free moral agency in creation, and weave an imaginary character with attributes and characteristics free from all the incumbrances of the human in man; and who is without a living counterpart?

Reader, we introduce Raymond Humphrey to you as a human being; if you see him doing things discordant with your idea of right, do not be any more surprised than you would be to hear of one of your friends shooting his neighbor's horse and perverting the truth to evade the law; do not be any more surprised than you would be to hear of Bill Jones and Tom Brown, who are both elders in the church, spitting venomous fire and slanderous epithets at each other and at their neighbors; in fact, do not be any more surprised than you would be to hear that your honest friend, whose heart you deemed the throne of sublimest Christian integrity, had told a lie for a dollar.

Mr. Humphrey is in love (this shows he is human) with Iris Earle—this annuls the human, for even the

Gods would love her. Norman and Lois know it—every one knows it but Iris. She has never thought of it; she knows there has been a strange spell upon her for the past few months, which moves her spirits to the highest tension of hope, and then lets them down into despondency; she has never divined the meaning or cared to know the cause of it. The woman who could read her sister's soul before she read it herself, now can't read her own. Never thinks of love in connection with herself.

Two women in love at Rosedale, either of which would forfeit their lives before acknowledging it was so. Lois at one time came to the conclusion that she loved Norman, but such a conclusion was fraught with so much pain and conscience-burning, she reversed her decision, and ever since has been content to call it an infatuating friendship. Ingenious love, or woman! Surely the serpent is absent—which is it?

Raymond and Norman were not ignorant of the veritable feeling in their hearts or its cause. Raymond knew he loved Iris; he said so ever since the first time he saw her; he also knew he was going to try to make her aware of it.

Norman had solved the problem long ago; but he had passed a resolution, as strong as self, that he would never unburden his heart to Lois; she would never know what he had endured through her. He thought it might be a crime against God and man to love the wife of another; but there was no remedy for such a love; it was a sickness no physician could cure; a heart-hunger which nothing but a caress from Lois could ever appease.

Iris ceased her vigil upon Lois and Norman; they did not now seem more devoted than friendship warranted; *not more devoted than Mr. Humphrey and she*, and she knew they were not in love! Their relation was only a congenial feast in the confidential chambers of friendship. Sometimes she would see them alone in the garden gathering flowers, or at the fountain watching the amber sunset; strange, but she

never thought of love or any of its influences; all that old prudence had gone.

When she would enter the library and see their heads inclined over the same book, their locks sometimes touching in love kisses, she never thought of the sorrow that might come; it reminded her only of Raymond, who had become a frequent visitor at Rosedale, never consenting for a week to pass between calls.

* * * * *

It was a lovely May evening that he drove out of the corporate limits of Nashville in the direction of the enchanted grounds; made sacred to him by the presence of Iris.

"Bon soir, Queen Dido," he smiled, as he approached the trellised summer house in which reclined a graceful figure deeply absorbed in a book.

"And pray who is my Æneas," laughed she in surprise, from a floral palace, as the book dropped upon her lap.

"I aspire to be him by appointment," returned Raymond, a little confused.

"Oh, then, I had as well despatch for Mars, or else imagine myself Minerva and have you beheaded for presumption. The immortal soliloquy of the Prince of Denmark is yet an unknown scroll to me. The present finds me impervious to the Ophelic epidemic of love. So I consider myself quite secure with King Æneas," she responded, as she saw a deeper flush of confusion come over Raymond's face.

"Do not give metaphors a literal interpretation, regardless of the author's design," he stammered.

"Does it please his royal highness to ventilate himself upon his hieroglyphical declaration?" she questioned, as she motioned him to a seat at her side.

"You have converted a serious implication into the most humiliating type of Momus," repeated Raymond, as he obeyed her request to be seated.

"Why so, king?" she tauntingly said.

"I—I—only meant to convey the idea that firmness and truth were so impressibly written upon the

lineaments of your face that, if you ever loved, rather than be disloyal, or live without it, you would die. And it was a grave perversion of my meaning to place me in the attitude of a truant knight."

The pale hue of sad memory instantly stole over her face at the mention of "love," but as quickly vanished. A mirthful, mischievous light came into her eyes at the mention of a "truant knight." She saw how deeply embarrassed he was, and determined not to let the opportunity escape for a rare and laughable joke. She said:

"Well, Mr. Humphrey, I must confess the obscurity and presumptuous significance of your language has caused me some little disappointment. My nature being all candid instead of evasive, I usually interpret words by their primary sense; but for the flattering comment with which you honor me, I will suspend the best known rules of interpretation and abide by your explanation."

"Permit me to reconstruct my language, and call myself your valiant knight. Would you like *Ivanhoe* for your prince?"

"And what call me—Rowena?" she asked hesitatingly.

"Would you wear the crown?" he anxiously questioned, feeling that her answer would, in a measure, bring life or death.

"I never could bear Rowena; she was the patron goddess of weakness. You would not take me for the fair-haired Rowena? See, my tresses are as dark as Nox. I always admired the dark-eyed Rebecca. Do you want to call me Rebecca, Mr. Humphrey?" she smiled, with a mischievous light in her eyes.

"I will call you both, he emphasized.

"No! no! I could not live a double life!" she exclaimed.

"There could not be one without the other. And who will be my Rowena?" he said and waited in breathless suspense.

A sweet, musical laugh rippled over her lips, as she answered:

"Mr. Humphrey, I am astonished that a man of your social distinction should make such a ludicrous request of me. Rebecca did not select Rowena for Ivanhoe, nor did he ask it of her. This is a question fraught with so much interest and responsibility to yourself that I did not think you would trust it into other hands. It is impossible to transform myself into both; and you know it is a scientific law that two things can't occupy the same space at the same time. If I must do you a kindness by serving in the capacity of one or the other, as an American, I claim the right to choose for myself. I do hope you will not think me selfish because I seem a little intractable."

"Miss Iris, this is a very serious matter with me, and I want you to give me your honest opinion upon the subject. Don't, please don't turn everything I say into irony and levity; for if there is a subject in the vast domain of thought which engages the profoundest interest and love of my heart it is this. Have you been so blind to all the emotions and tenderness of my heart, that you have not divined its feelings and purposes? O, heart of woman! the throne of love! have you never felt the thrill that enraptures existence in the sweetest delights? If until now the eyes of your soul have been closed, I am a ruined, a hopeless man; for there are no other lips, no other eyes that can speak quietude into my throbbing heart. You are the hub around which the little world of my being revolves; these fragrant flowers, these aromatic woods, breathing spicy odors, wear their crown of beauty by your consent.

"It is now in your power to enrich the life I am destined to live with noble aims and acts of consoling charity, or to strike the chord that will wreck my happiness on the breakers of despair; and then a voice will echo in your ears, 'O, Iris! Iris!'

"There stands a spectre in your hall;
The guilt of blood is at your door;
You changed a wholesome heart to gall;
You held your course without remorse.'"

His listener grew very impatient under his eloquence and imploring earnestness; for his burning words fell not on the soul of her he worshipped, but under the excitement to which thoughts of this interview had wrought his mind, he, for once, was blinded by the likeness of the sisters, and had poured forth his soul to Lois.

Prompted by a spirit of humor, Lois at first had led him on. When she realized the intensity of his words her courage failed to reveal her position to him. Now she resolved to stop the impetuous strain of love-burning words; she did not think it too late and deemed an explanation unnecessary. With a deep sigh of regret, she lifted the book from her lap and said:

"Let us postpone this subject. When you came I was reading *Ligeia*."

Raymond was very fond of reading. Lois could not have selected a subject so fascinating to him. He had read everything from the pen of Edgar Allan Poe; he was proud of him as an American author; he loved to discourse upon the brilliant genius that characterized his diction. So when she called his attention to the book she had been reading, it did for a while divert his attention.

Lowering his voice into the pathos of subdued love, he said:

"Do you like *Ligeia*?"

"I do not know. It has a charm for me; but when I read it a bubble of sadness rises in my heart, leaving me just a little dissatisfied," she said softly.

As she looked up into the handsome face at her side, the sadness deepened in her heart. Those eyes of love and poetry were placed upon her in such pathetic entreaty; his eyes were moist with tears, and she knew his heart was engulfed in a stormy ocean. She wished it was possible for Iris to come and take her place and drink from the hidden depths of those eyes that were feasting upon the beauty which belonged to her. She felt her own bosom move in pity and sympathy for him, but she could not tell him the

truth. The *jeu d'esprit* had been carried too far now. If she had known the sorrow, the heart-weariness and longing that this evening's freak would cost, the ludicrousness, nor the ridiculousness of her situation would not have stayed her tongue one moment from making a proud confession. O, what misery and grief are sometimes couched in the phraseology of one sentence, or the outgrowth of a frivolous act!

"Perhaps there is some analogy between Ligeia and yourself which will account for the strange fascination followed by a corresponding depression. We all sometimes see objects and read of characters which awake half suggestive impulses and ideas that superinduce the heart to give a spontaneous bound in awe of future dread. Yet when by introspection, we search for a cause there is a blankness in the testimony, and a profound mystery envelops the whole matter, leaving us extremely unpleasant, without being able to ascertain the cause," he said in a monotone indicating his earnestness.

"Mr. Humphrey, you are an excellent metaphysician, discriminating and analyzing with mathematical accuracy those recondite and abstruse subjects where the nicest distinctions of the mind are evolved; but I must call in question your ability to elucidate the comparison you suggest as probable," responded Lois, attempting to interest him.

"Before you handed me this book," began Raymond, "this phantasmic production of Poe flitted across my mind associated with you. Why, I know not. Whether it was the mysterious influence of your electrified mind upon the slumbering impressions of memory, or the real likeness between yourself and the image hidden away in the vaults of sleeping impression, I do not know. But before Ligeia was mentioned I thought of her, while regaling the eyes of admiration upon your face of symmetrical loveliness. Your difference from all other women—except your sister—adds an inexpressible freshness to your beauty. Your lofty forehead, faultless in its contour; your hair, blacker than the raven wings of midnight; your

unrivaled face, your complexion as white as ivory, and as luxurious in its smoothness; your mouth inexpressibly sweet—the magnificent turn of the upper lip—the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under; the dimples which sport and the color which speaks; your teeth radiating back, with a brilliancy almost startling—every ray of light which falls upon them in your serene and placid, yet most exultingly bright of all smiles; these similar features in your physiognomy carried my mind back to the midnight hour when I first read *Ligeia*.”

“There is no standard,” she began, “by which you can judge beauty. You men all have your distinct ideas of æsthetics, differing as widely as your goddesses do. Every man would call the object of his love beautiful, and to that extent she would remind him of *Ligeia*. Beauty is something which must awake the admiration of the soul or else it cannot exist as a fascinating medium.”

“Then you are my *Ligeia*, my beautiful one!” he said.

Lois’ heart ached in shame at every word.

Continuing, he said: “My heart has always had its spectral beauty; but it never dreamed that its imagery would be realized in one so heavenly beautiful as you are. If other men could see you from the inner depths of the soul’s undying vision they would worship you with a love equal to idolatry and all other women would become dependent pests. O, believe me, fair queen! this is no boyish fancy, destined only to a spasmodic existence; it is the real, the one and only love of a man’s heart. In all the realms of this and unknown worlds, there is not another who can take your place in my fancy.

God alone shaped and fitted your disposition and character to harmonize in all its exquisite loveliness with the divinely given ideal of my own nature. How the soul in all its delicate mechanism is susceptible of impression, is a strange mystery to me; but why I love, is answered in the complete submission of all my earthly interest into your care, to do this re-

quires but the exercise of those fundamental principles upon which the moral man is sustained. I love you because you meet the wants and demands of both my poetical and practical life. There are combined in you the stimulating influences that would enable me to manfully meet the disappointments that so often collide with us on the road of duty, and the soul of poetry which would catch all the wild heart-beats of secret meditation and return them in softest kisses.

"Now, lovely flower, whose beauty is all thine own let us drop the names of 'Rowena' and 'Ligeia.' My love is too ardent, of too deep concern, to postpone what I came to say this evening."

"Oh, no! please do not!" she exclaimed in her disgrace.

He heeded not the soft, pleading words; his heart was overflowing with love.

"I have no beautiful home like this to let you rule as queen, but I own a small city home—not gorgeous and magnificent with turreted walls and shining roofs; but it is the embodiment of simplicity and neatness. I want you for its queen—to rule with the sceptre of gentleness its king—"

"Oh! please! please! Mr. Humphrey! you are mistaken," she gasped in shameful despair.

"Darling, how can you treat my avowal with such cruel indifference. Mistaken! mistaken! impossible!"

"Not that way!" she exclaimed, meaning to tell him she was not Iris; but over her poor, unfortunate head unrelenting fate held sway and stayed the words that, to-day unspoken, will be the means, in the not far distant future, of bringing the wicked to justice. Condemn her not; it is the hand of destiny.

Without noticing the interruption, Raymond continued:

"For months I've had the living witness within me. I have immersed myself in society's throng, thinking when I emerged from its healing balm, this love would have disappeared. But ah! deluded fool I was! No power can extirpate the germinating seed

which your lovely, divine orbs have sown in my soul, and about which it has ever sung in dreams and in reality.

"I never saw an eye so bright;
And yet so soft as hers;
It sometimes swam in liquid light,
And sometimes swam in tears;
It seemed a beauty set apart
For softness and for sighs."

"Mistaken! Iris, you don't know what you say. If I look upon you now and see your face, it is a myth, a phantasy, a soul-dream; I do not see your face; If so, I do not love you. If, when I breathe the odorous particles that emanate from the flower, I am mistaken—there is nothing fragrant about it—then I am mistaken, and I do not love you. Impossible, Iris! I cannot be mistaken.

"Art thou not dearer to my eyes than light?
Dost thou not circulate through all my veins?
Mingle with life, and form my very soul?"

Lois tried to speak: her tongue was silent.

Raymond saw there was some great inward excitement, but did not know its cause. He thought she had become tired of his importunities, and that impatience had caused the jetty lashes to droop on the flushed cheek, that at his last words, grew deathly white. As he contrasted the pale face of pity and remorse with the peach-bloom tint of the cheek and the laughing eyes which smiled him a welcome, those words of Miss Landon passed over his lips:

"Eyes that droop like summer flowers,
Told they could change with shine and showers,"

And a feeling of sad regret came into his heart for what he had said; but he could not restrain himself longer. His love was not a night-dream, but—

"Love was to his impassioned soul
Not, as with others, a mere part
Of his existence, but the whole—
The very life breath of his heart."

Looking into her face with eyes of burning eloquence, he said:

"O, Iris!——"

"Would to God she could hear you!" was the agonized wail of Lois' heart.

"My precious, lovely Iris! I am going to say good-bye. Sweet voice, the only music for my soul, I cannot resist the power of your love if I remain. The poet says that love makes cowards of the heroes, and the coward valiant. Iris, I have bowed the pride of my heart before you—offered you its queenship; but, alas! to no place or purpose. Henceforth I must never meet you. To-night I leave my home to go—O, God! I know not where. My heart longs for some quiet home, where placid dreams and sweet images of you will be my only association.

"Away in my solitude the voice I hear will be—

"There is not a look, a word of thine
My soul hath ever forgot;
Thou ne'er hast bid a ringlet shine,
Nor given thy locks one graceful twine,
Which I remember not."

"Oh, Iris, why don't you bid me stay? Did disappointment ever come upon man so suddenly and grievously—taking his soul out into the vast ocean of woe, where hope is dying and life but an empty shell? O, God! I cannot—I cannot endure this burden—the gall of misery has burst into my heart. This is more cruel than murder, more poisonous to the soul than sin. Iris, my queenly love, forgive me if I make you sorrowful. Soon I will be gone, and tears will no more lave your wan cheeks; but roses will bloom and your eyes beam brightness upon your soul's choice."

"O, do not—for God's sake do not! I cannot tell you more; but it is—it is so——," she exclaimed in her misery and speechless shame.

He folded her to his bosom in one short, spasmodic embrace; his lips pressed hers, and he wildly, passionately cried:

"Iris, my beautiful goddess—my love-made Iris, in this face of exquisite beauty lies every mortal hope of my life. Is this the only time I will ever touch thy soft lips? The only time I will ever entwine my arms around thy graceful image? When I am gone

think of me often, and pray for me. It is love for thee that drives me away—*unanswered love*, darling.”

He gently replaced her in her seat, and, without uttering another word, walked rapidly away.

She called out in despair:

“Come back; come back! I know Iris loves you;” but her faint voice never reached his ears. She tried so often during his avowal to tell him of his mistake, but could not.

* * * * *

Raymond Humphrey drove rapidly home, hurriedly packed his effects and, without breathing his troubles or motives to any one, ordered them to the South Eastern; and in less than an hour he was speeding his way behind the great iron horse to St. Louis.

If, as he left Lois, he had looked to the right he would have seen the true Iris—the object of his real love; but his sorrow was too fresh, too severe and heart-rending to notice what was near him.

Iris stood looking after him in chained, wondering surprise. She saw him take Lois in his arms—saw the long, passionate kiss, but could not hear his words. She had been waiting for him in the drawing-room all the evening. Many times her heart had throbbed with pleasure at a sound she had mistaken for his footstep upon the pavement. She had longed for his presence with such incomprehensible desire; now this was all of it; this was her disappointment. While she was anxiously waiting for him, he was entertaining her sister with tender caresses beneath the luxuriant vines and fragrant flowers of a summer house.

“Stolen kisses are sweetest,” she repeated; “it must be so, since men and women act it.”

It came like a thunder-clap upon her pure heart, and human nature shed its pride, leaving bare the heart in its agony of acknowledged love. Yes, for the first time in her life, Iris Earle was compelled to confess, though with conscious shame, that she loved Raymond Humphrey. At first her mind and finer

sensibilities of her nature revolted. But as she felt the color recede from her face, and cold beads of perspiration, like rain drops, upon her classic brow, she involuntarily confessed:

"Yes; I love him! My sister—begone that name, I will not call you by it any more! Lois Allen, I hate you! With my eyes and my beauty reflected over your black, treacherous heart, you have won him."

She gave one look at the white figure that lay prostrate, overcome and exhausted in chagrin and mortification, then turned her steps toward the house a changed woman—changed from a Christian, credulous woman into a proud, indignant, disappointed and doubting statue of stupified grief.

The voice of love awakes the soul's first cry of agony, and jealousy—"that lying fiend"—the "pain of pains"—it is king.

"All other passions have their hours of thinking
And hear the voice of reason; this alone
Breaks the first suspicion into phrensy,
And sweeps the soul in tempest."

CHAPTER X.

NORMAN AND LOIS.

Yes, love indeed is a light from heaven,
A spark of that immortal fire
With angels shared, by Allah given
To lift from earth our low desire.

When Lois aroused from her exhaustion it was some time before she could fully understand what had occurred. Her first impulse was to tell Iris just what had taken place, and if any injury had been wrought it could be corrected. The question often presented itself, "How could she make the necessary explanation to Raymond Humphrey?" She was very sorry she had conducted herself so imprudently, and was highly enraged with herself for it. She half envied

Iris as she thought how strong and nobly she was loved. The whole conversation rushed upon her, bringing with it a train of misery and regret.

Raymond Humphrey's low, musical voice still whispered in her ears the secret treasure of his heart, intended for the ears of none but Iris; she had acted so dishonorably and unladylike as to enter the sanctuary of his heart, bringing distress upon herself and blasting the life of her sister. How was she to extricate herself from this act of folly and relieve her conscience of its sore conviction?

While Mr. Humphrey was in his wild exclamations of love, her heart had been touched, and she longed for the first time in her life for loving arms to twine around her in tender sympathy, and breathe the story of a heart into her ears.

The sun was descending behind the verdure crowned hills of the west, when Lois prepared to return to the house; but the genii who preside over Fate ordained that she should not go.

"Mrs. Allen, I have been searching for you an hour. I had persuaded myself that something had gone wrong with you. I inquired of Miss Iris; she knew nothing of you. Where have you been?" inquired Norman.

Lois raised her silken lashes while a slight shade of color came into her face.

"I have been here," she laughed.

"What have you been doing? You look so pale. Are you ill?" he said, coming to her side.

"I am not myself just now, but will be presently," she said with a look of indifference.

"Tell me, Mrs. Allen, about yourself. You are to me what no other woman has or ever can be," he insisted.

As Lois thought over what had passed, she said:

"Won't some other time do as well as now?" thinking she would unburden her whole heart to him.

"Yes, that will do," he said gently, "but let us stay out in the inspiration of twilight. I want to be with you for a while. I have been so lonely this

evening. Has my presence become monotonous that you preferred solitude to it?"

"Mr. Wellington, your intimations are a little unkind," she interposed with an air of wounded esteem.

"I did not mean them so. Only it was the first time you ever failed to pass the evening with me since I've been at Rosedale, and I thought the diversion might have been owing to my inattentiveness."

"You have been exceedingly kind in attending to my wants. I am sure I did not know my absence would occasion your slightest displeasure. Will you accept the earnest contrition of my heart for this little point of waywardness?" she smiled over her sad lips.

"You could not commit an act against me, or any one else, but that I would forgive it. I could not treasure up unkindness against you. My heart would revolt with all the indignity of my interior nature. Mrs. Allen, before my acquaintance with you ripened into our pleasant relationship, I was never called upon to think seriously of our existence; but, with your advent into my life, there has come a generalization of the claims which the present and future hold by creation upon us."

She resumed her seat near him and folded her jeweled hands upon her bosom; her eyes aglow with the suppressed fire of love, had lost their expressionless gaze of weariness; a warm kindling interest had crept over her face, leaving traces of deepening color. She never grew weary of Norman's conversations. To her he was *par excellence*. She looked into his handsome, fascinating face, contrasting it with the strong, intellectual one she had so often peered into during the evening out of eyes of cowering shame.

Thus she answered him:

"If I have given you a broader and more comprehensive conception of the design of human creation, it is a high source of gratification. It is a selfish aim, but it is usually the climax of our social ambition to supply the demands of those for whom we have the greatest regard; after this selfishness is ac-

complished our love and aspirations become catholic. The most exemplary Christian has secret sins. We cannot crucify the flesh in that sense which elevates all men to a common level of attachment. In what way has life become a question of momentous interest to you?"

"When engaged in the busy world of traffic, I seldom thought of where I would go after death. I relegated such themes to the physicist of leisure, who had the ability to reason, if not to enlighten. I thought if I took care of the physical life, I would accomplish the aims of this world; that the power of the universal God would provide admirably for the disembodied remains of my being at death. While I have not been converted from this universal salvation of mankind, regardless of dogmas, creeds, or conduct, I have called in question its justice and rationality; and have been led to think seriously of the moral object the creator has woven into the creature as the goal of life."

"But why do you poison your mind with these metaphysical theories concerning the future, when there has been a revelation upon the subject, placing beyond debatable controversy that man must arise from the dead and be judged according to deeds done in the body?" she said, rather triumphantly.

"Mrs. Allen, my confidence in your honesty is at present the highest evidence I have of the truth of your religion; but, if I am forced to dissent from your view as to its origin, and call in question the many fanatic and superstitious ideas connected with it; I hope you will not grow impatient with me. Convince me that Christ is divine and the supernatural circumstances said to have attended his birth are a reality, then Christ's enunciations would claim my sober and most reverential attention. Remove this cardinal and fundamental assumption, which is by no means established or made an authentic fact, from the Christian religion, and of all articles of religious faith it is the most absurd and least plausible."

"I am glad you came to me to discuss this question, because I feel that I will be able to convince you of your error, if not to-night, then at some future day. As you state, if Jesus Christ is not the Son of God our religion is false and an imposition upon the credulity of man. But I never felt the least doubt of its truth. The head of our church was not veiled in obscurity during his lifetime, and his assertion concerning his origin and himself was questioned by his enemies; every possible advantage was taken to prove him an imposter, but when tried in the courts of justice by persecuting enemies, there was no guilt found in him.

"His grave was made secure, but he burst asunder the cerements of death and came forth. You keep sacred the first day of every week to acknowledge his resurrection; every time you write the day of the month and year you acknowledge his birth," she said, her face aglow with interest.

Could Lois have seen the ghostly figure that had stealthily crept to the summer house and buried its face in the vines to catch every word that was spoken, pallor and deathliness would again have swept over her face.

"These are your witnesses whose testimony you would have me to receive," began Norman.

"The apostles are our witnesses, though he was seen of above five hundred after his resurrection; besides the most authentic profane history, contemporary with the events of his life, does not deny that he arose from the dead. But for argument, suppose the twelve apostles are the only witnesses we have of this stupendous fact. Would not their testimony place it beyond controversy? Has there ever been a truth so firmly established but what there were a few dissenting voices? Then, if the intelligences of the world for eighteen hundred years have received the testimony of the twelve as credible, with only a few dissenters, does it not whisper a great truth in your ears, and contrast you as a pigmy compared with the giant minds who have thrown down the gauntlet

of sin; and, through the experience of love in the heart, proclaimed that they were credible witnesses? Civilization and education are based upon their testimony. Every church edifice, whether Greek or Roman, Catholic or Protestant, has for its moral corner stone the testimony of the twelve."

The pale figure, with eyes of "azure blue and golden ringlets," drew a long sigh as Lois concluded, but it was wafted from their ears by the mild breeze.

"Your reasoning is entitled to some consideration, but I rather think you hang too much of your faith upon the credulity of men. Admitting that you have all the traditional and historical evidence confirming the doctrine that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, how are you to ever harmonize its narrowness with the attributes of justice and mercy! A father owes his children protection and education; the child in return owes its father obedience to all just—not unjust—demands. Has a father the right to establish laws in his household economy which he knows, if enforced, will result in bodily harm to his children? Men owe their gratitude where favors have been granted.

"If God has created a certain portion of humanity, whether by decree or free agency, to supply the wails of hell and the other portion to enjoy perfect felicity in heaven, it is the most inhuman and barbarous act ever perpetrated. It is contradictory to the eloquence of Christ on the Mount, where he commands to "love your neighbor as yourself," and an insult to brotherly kindness and sympathy. What kind of a heart would I possess if the whisper should come into my heart—'you are saved, but your neighbor is lost,' and I exclaim, 'Thank God, it is so.' What is this? *a hallelujah over my own redemption*, and a shout over the calamity of my neighbor. Away with such bigotry and self-exclusiveness! What a glaring contradiction! What a medley of ingenious sophistry!

"Tell me on one page to rejoice over my own fortunes, on the next page to 'love my neighbor as myself!' Where is the man who is inspired by the great

principle of social brotherhood that could steep his soul in the luxuries of heaven, without a soft murmur of grief and sympathy for his brother who he knows to be writhing in the chains of hell? Reconcile this unfatherly, unbrotherly-like and monstrous doctrine with the attributes of mercy and justice and I will confess you have taught me white is black."

Norman had discussed this subject with Lois before, but his feelings were about to get the better of his discretion on this occasion; he could not enter into a calm, detailed statement of argument, as was his custom. He doubtless felt his cause was waning under the clear, logical answers which Lois concisely gave to his questions. Lois did not feel equal to the mental exertion necessary to a systematic reply to all Mr. Wellington had said; but, being stimulated by the importance of the theme and the admiration she possessed for her auditor, she determined on an effort.

Tapping the palm of her hand gently with an exquisite bunch of flowers which she held in the other, she said:

"Mr. Wellington, before I enter fully into a reply, I want you to answer a question. Is man a moral being?" She paused for a reply.

After thinking a moment, he said:

"Yes; I assent to that."

She continued:

"Your skepticism is rather on the altruistic order. Altruism, when associated with Christianity prepares a man for heaven; but then it loses its skeptical origin and is not known as altruism. You believe you should live entirely for others and that all your conscientious enjoyment must be enjoyed as a benefactor of mankind? Admit it, and what promise have you of a reward? But you smile and say, 'To do good for a reward is selfishness.' Here you make a mistake. Our conscience is the soul's barometer, either excusing or accusing; to be guided by it is to do the best we can with the light before us. God's love for duty beckons us onward until our lives are in harmony with His will; He takes us home, blesses us,

not because we were actuated by the promise of reward, but because we did our duty as a moral responsibility.

"In admitting man a moral being, you make sin a possibility. A *moral being* is a *creature of conditions*, and of course is amenable to law. What law then is man subject to? One of his own device, or one co-existent with his origin—changing with the different periods of providential intervention. The very idea of a creature suggests law. The insect and brute have instinctive habits necessary to the full vigor of health. A *moral being* not only suggests a law, but a moral law. Then, pray who should be the author of that law but the creator of the moral being for which it was designed? Do you think God is unjust because He made man a moral being? He could not have made him anything else except a brute, or have made him equal to Himself. The Bible is the oldest book and the only one that gives a history of the origin and destiny of man. It more especially discourses upon moral training, and is adapted in all respects to the wants of spiritual appetites.

"Now, Mr. Wellington, until you have found a better, a more ancient one than the Bible, you will be constrained to accept it as the book designed by the Creator for the moral being—which you say man is—to instruct him in all things pertaining to his enlightenment. This book teaches a hell prepared for those who are disobedient, for those who of their own choice do another way; it teaches us a heaven where the right-doing will assemble to enjoy rest—perfect rest."

Lois would have continued, but Norman interrupted with a question:

"What kind of rest will that be?"

"A rest from weariness, from trouble, from grief, and all the irregularities of this life," she answered, with all the faith of her soul.

"That word 'rest' has a charm for me inexpressibly sweet. My heart craves 'rest' over the hopeful gleam that breaks from every parted cloud. I would

give the remainder of my life to tears of weeping, if I knew, in the end, rest—eternal rest would come. The great world of skepticism, with its constant vicissitudes charm me, while you are content with the simple faith of Christ. Ah! it may be better after all. Do my views really strike you as being absurd?" he said, rather tenderly.

"No, Mr. Wellington, I have great respect for your views, only you would supplant a living principle—the germ of love and hope—with a rationalistic dogma; but let us not enter upon another elaborate discussion of this subject to-night. You look wearied and careworn this evening." She spoke in a gentle tone of authority.

Norman looked into the perfect face of serene loveliness. Those words of Byron paused upon his lips:

"Her eye was large and dark, suppressing half its fire."

Then, without guarding his speech, he said:

"Weary, yes weary. I have been so a long time."

"Mr. Wellington," she breathed tenderly, as she placed her hand near him, "are you thinking of poor Mrs. Wellington, who sleeps over at Elmwood? This morning I was at her grave. I gathered some fresh, dewy flowers and placed them upon it. When that 'rest' comes of which I told you, you will go to her."

While offering words of comfort, as she thought, her heart felt a keen pang of jealousy that his affections were lavished upon another, though it were the sacred dead; to herself she tried to justify her thoughts by an attempt to console him.

"I often think of the lone sleeper at Elmwood—the green mound covered with creeping vines and daisies, and the funeral day, but my trouble came before then. I want a respite from it," he said almost tearfully.

The small figure couched in a black wrap whispered inaudibly: "The Sultan's wife is keeping late hours with his friend. If he knew it he would hie homeward in a great rage."

"You have," began Lois entreatingly, "enlisted my sympathy. Do not forbid me knowing for what my dearest friend suffers."

Had Lois taken one glance into the past, she would not even have hesitated, but impulsively led the way to the house. Her admiration of Norman was so complete that, while in his presence, she was oblivious to everything else. She loved Norman—cold word, it cannot express one vowel of her adoration. She did not want to love him; but it was impossible to prevent it; in his presence her heart seemed to find perfect rest.

"My dear Mrs. Allen, it is impossible for you to know all the secret impulses of my heart; but you must know what I have striven to keep a profound secret. I cannot think you have been totally blind and ignorant to what I have felt. Words are powerless to convey my feeling, but I love you! I have fought against this love since it first came that beautiful spring morning you came into my store shopping. This is a strong man's love—the ripe passion of *mature age* and deliberation. I know you will tell me this is sin. I know it will cause you many nights of sleepless remorse. But, O, God! I could not refrain from telling you to-night that I loved you,——"

Lois unconsciously pressed his hand as she answered:

"Mr. Wellington, I know you love me; but it will be better for us never to give way to our feeling. You know my circumstances. *I am a wife.*"

Oh! how cold and hard the word "wife" seemed to grate upon her ears; she was a wife only in name; her whole heart belonged to another by ties of love which only heaven could burst asunder.

"It may be better," he gasped, "but is it possible? It is fate against the weakness of man. 'Love is a god, strong, free, unbounded,' consuming every other passion, leaving me bereft of all power to act my part with worthy bearing."

"O, such sentimentality!" breathed the concealed figure, as she drank every word. A self-reproachful

smile came over her face as she thought of whom she was, and who she was now. She admired the face of Lois as she saw it by moonlight, but she had no sympathy just then to give her.

For one moment Lois realized with true womanly instinct that she was about to desecrate the sacred altar of marriage—bring irretrievable shame upon herself and dishonor upon her husband. The crime was enormous to her unsoiled reputation; she lifted her eyes towards heaven as if imploring strength to fight this sin. But she felt that God knew she did not will to love in this way, and that though it was a sin against society, it could not be forbidden in heaven when love had come like hers. How expressive these lines from Elizabeth Haywood, she thought, as they passed through her mind :

“Love’s not the effect of reason or of will;
Few feel that passion’s force because they choose.”

“Her love had come without reason or will—some higher agent than herself was responsible for it. There was no justice or reason in saying that she was culpable for a thing she did not will or wish, and I can’t be mistaken,” she reflected. “If—

“‘Love indeed is a light from Heaven—
A spark from that immortal fire,’

“how could hers be a sin? It was but a higher order of attachment—not dependent upon external association for the nutriment upon which it subsisted; but upon the impartation of the divine spark by the agent of her affections.”

She felt God would protect her from any of the baser passions of human nature, and that he would keep such love as hers warmed by the holy fires of heaven. Lowering her eyes from the azure sky she placed them upon Norman; his were burning with a light which told he was suppressing the strong, impassioned and fervent emotion of his heart. She could not withhold a reply longer :

“Can we not separate and forget all this? My soul measures your heart in all it could have felt for

me." Her voice faltered as tears inundated her cheeks.

"Oh! Mrs. Allen, do you return my love? Tell me from your own lips!" he exclaimed half overcome with delight.

She took his hand in both of hers and pressed her velvet lips to it as she whispered:

"Is not this sweeter than words can tell you, but we must not, we must separate."

"Must not do what?" he repeated. "Love each other? That which exists cannot be destroyed. My love is real; it cannot—no never—submit to but one change; and that to 'despair.' Did you ever think of a murdered heart, a wrecked and hopeless life?—that is the meaning of the only change that can ever take place. We cannot explain love away; we cannot assuage it in pleasure or ambition; it is the strongest, the most powerful passion of man; all others must bow a suppliant knee before it.

"Love is not to be reasoned down, or lost
In high ambition, or thirst of greatness.
'Tis second life; it grows into the soul,
Warms every vein and beats in every pulse.
I feel it here; my resolution melts.'

"You cannot mean that we must separate. My own precious Lois, (I have never called you by that name before; how musical it is) you say that you love me. Has it been burned into your heart against your will—antagonizing the highest conceptions of life?"

"O! Mr. Wellington, do not plead with me. My heart has always been yours. I tried not to love you; I prayed—I fought against it; but my best and surest strength failed me. I feel I owe to the man, who has at last won my heart, a full confession, trusting to his love for exoneration. Do not censure me for loving you. I am but a *woman*, and God made me to love. There has always been an aching void in my bosom, and I longed for something to supply it. 'Love'—the whole of woman's existence—has come; but it was a long time, and when it did, it was shame, though

its secret bubbles were sweet. Oh! would to God, I could recall the mistake of my life—that one sad, fatal mistake—marriage. Married to a man I never have or can love, a mistake that means misery, remorse and death. Mr. Wellington, pity me, and don't judge me by the inflexible rules of caste.

"I am not the meanest of women—my conscience yet reproves me; but could one of my sex endure this? No; not if she loved as I do you. My heart must speak its life or die. Stop the pulse in my wrist and I am dead—I am powerless to do this act without committing suicide; so I can't check the emotional breathing of love without murdering that which God has implanted within. I live, I breathe, I have my existence through you; but I could love you exiled to some foreign land as I love you here. Your presence, in the spirit, would always be with me, and I could live in the past when you were at my side." She sank back to her seat almost exhausted.

She did not want him to go away, but she knew it would be better so; she never thought if she could bear to see him leave.

Norman was deeply grieved; he understood how passionately he was loved by Lois, and how much it cost to love him. He felt that he would be willing to sacrifice his life for her happiness. He knew she was a true, noble woman; he had never doubted it.

"Lois, we both have a life to live; the future is veiled in obscurity; we know not what is before us; it may be separation or death; but come what may, it will ever be my honest aim to shield your name from slander. I will be as true to you as I am to myself. But, darling Lois, let me stay at Rosedale. Do not drive me away by your disapproval. I fear you do not understand your own feelings or anticipate the day's long-suffering and loneliness consequent upon such a move; but, Lois, I will bear and dare all for your sake. If you decide definitely that you want me to go away, I will obey you. There is no grief, no sorrow, but what I will bear in obedience to the slightest wish of yours.. When I avowed my love to

you to-night I did it with all the sincerity and candor of my nature. On this subject the future will find me as intractable and determined as the laws of the universe. My nature is characterized with a firmness that will never give way under the pressure of grief or the affairs of the world.

"My heart and future are as much yours as if they had been so incorporated in the decrees.

" 'Yes, let the eagle change his plume,
The leaf its hue the flower its bloom,
But ties around this heart are spun
Which will not, cannot be undone.' "

"Lois, I have always been proud and unyielding to anything of this kind, until I knew you. You have wrought a great and wonderful change in my life. The first look into your face sent a thrill along memory's line until it faded into indistinctness, leaving me in a maze of bewilderment. My remembrance was challenged to recall a chapter of events belonging to the past, which has baffled my most strenuous endeavor. I know it in the sense that I know I have a mind in communication with a consciousness that you have been associated with my past. There is a mysterious link which I cannot define with any degree of assurance. Your face wears the impress that the earliest ideas of love autographed upon my heart; symbolizing the first enamored breath that enraptured my childhood. The future! ah, hopeless future! But the adumbrating voice of prophecy echoes along our pathless future cementing our destiny with the seal of inflexible fate. Lois Allen, we can never be separated. The Gods would cry out upon us. Our bodies may be dissociated, futile effort at separation! Our souls—they will and must live with each other; they will commune under the inspiration of a fragrant bouquet, and kiss while lost in a lover's meditation. Lois, if your asseverations convince me that your happiness demands my absence, I will go away from Rosedale to-morrow. But, oh, darling, before you give me your final decision, be sure it is the true expression of your heart. Upon this decision must rest

all my happiness; for by it I am destined to know the nature of your love.

"I can't be happy with your love, unless I could make you mine by marriage; but I will be far less happy without it. Darling, my sweet, precious Lois, beneath the soft refulgence of the moon, I want to make you a promise; I call upon the stars, the emblems of constancy, to witness it. My love shall be as eternal as the ceaseless hum of time; it shall be to you a monumental emblem of firmness and constancy. No petty cares, *no pride*, no profound and heart-rending sorrow, no financial reverses, nor all the ills that ever befell man, or all the victory that ever elated him can alter the edict that has gone from my heart—'I love you.'"

Norman would have continued, but Lois interrupted him. She threw her arms around him in adoring grace, her velvet lips pressed his in a kiss of warmest love and frankness, as she exclaimed:

"O, Mr. Wellington, I have drunk from the cistern of your soul until my heart is just overflowing with love. No," she continued, as she buried her face upon his bosom, "I can never let you go away now. My heart always cried against it, but I thought it would be best." She paused a moment; lifting her classical head with its silken tresses, she drew his face to hers and added: "Surely it is all of my heart to love you; such inexpressible, indefinable sweetness flows from love like this. There is so much I feel that I can't say; it is an inexhaustible fountain, which Psyche drank from when she would please her god; here Diana drank and her soul came on pinions of love to see the death-embalmed Endymion."

The rustling skirts of a moving figure arrested Lois as it glided away. Involuntarily she and Norman sprang to their feet and their eyes followed the retreating form.

"Who could it be?" they questioned.

"Evidently she has heard our entire conversation," gasped Lois as she clutched Norman's arm.

"Did you see the white, ghastly face as she looked



SHE THREW HER ARMS AROUND HIM IN ADORING
GRACE.

at us?" asked Norman, not heeding Lois' question.

"What does it all mean? Is it a ghost, with golden curls that a Saxon queen would be proud of? Is it a woman's haunting face that chills me? 'Spirits, when they please, can either sex assume, or both; so soft and uncompounded is their essence pure.'

"I must go in the house. That face haunts me. O, lost spirit from hades!"

A wild, unearthly shriek rang out on the still air, resounding with terror into the ears of the living; it was the shrill, keen voice of the maniac, mingled with that of desperation and misery.

"O, horrors! The evil genius is at Rosedale to-night. Why did those enraged eyes of deathly glare, flash revenge upon me? Norman, tell me it wasn't the spirit from Elmwood that came to me for loving you?"

As the last sentence trembled on her lips, she fell into his arms paralyzed with fear.

The mysterious form that had disappeared, now, with cat-like tread retraced its steps, and stood within a few paces of Norman watching the scene with eyes that rivaled hell in their fiendish gleam.

* * * * *

But for the appearance of the strange visitor on the privacy of this scene we protest against naming its sequence. A few hours since, she was defending the creed of her church, her face aglow with the inspiration of Christ. Was she sincere? Why doubt it? The duality of human life does not controvert it. It is the creed of Christendom where we would perfect life, the flesh is present. Was it God or the Fates who protected this woman against the mad awaking desire of her impassioned nature—who interposed at a moment when the Christian intuition and fortitude of a life-time was about to melt as wax under the warmth of her voluptuous passions? The white rose of Christianity might have been sacrificed on the altar of unhallowed love, and the night have ended in a nameless crime. Such is the weakness of *man* or *woman* whether of the *church* or the *world*.

If the facts exist, why ignore them. There is inherent, a germ, in the best life—most nobly lived, that renders sin a possibility. While a boy we have often toiled for hours in getting a large stone to the top of an overhanging cliff, in order to let it fall into the water below. Our only compensation was to hear the momentary splash. So when a woman, reared in the shadow of the church, the flexible tendrils of purity twined around her heart by loving counsel, in an hour—in a moment of wild, reckless, wanton enthusiasm—falls from the highest altitude of true womanhood; there is no compensation for the act that has undone the whole past; there is no sorrow or repentance that will redeem her self-respect. We will say, and believe, it was the hand of the Infinite who lowered the curtains on this scene, which doubtless saved our heroine years of continuous regret.

CHAPTER XI.

A VILLAIN'S REVENGE.

“Durst thou have looked upon him being awake,
And hast thou killed him sleeping? O, brave touch,
Could not a worm, an adder do so much?
An adder did; for with deadlier tongue
Than thine, thou serpent, never adder stung.”

Several months passed away at the Ancil Ranch without bringing much relief to the sufferings of Ed Loraine. Some days he would be much better, but his general condition remained unimproved. Age and affliction were slowly, imperceptibly taking him nearer the grave each month. His days seemed numbered to be few, before death would consign him to the posts of the dead. He was glad that Ike Ancil had returned; it afforded him the opportunity of preferring charges against him that would appease his conscience into quietude, and thus exonerate himself from all inward cowardice. The winter had gone and Ike had most assiduously avoided his presence, and

eluded with commendable skill every attempt Edmond Loraine endeavored to make upon his attention.

Whether this was because his callous heart cowered to face the man that he had so recreantly and foully wronged, or that he feared his presence would carry the sufferer's mind back into that period of unconsciousness, and, as by divine inspiration, recall a verse that would explain a tragedy as dark as the Stygian gulf, we do not know; but it was suspiciously evident that Ike Ancil's actions were controlled by cowardly motives. He would not have returned so soon to his possessions but he thought Mr. Loraine had been interred in his grave long since, and that at Ancil Ranch there would be nothing to remind him of the hideous past. On his arrival he was greatly astonished, and determined to retrace his steps after a few days' recreation; but being an enthusiast for hunting, a devotee of travel, a lover of new places, by sympathy and innate affiliation the champion of the coarse and vulgar rabble, he became so fascinated with frontier life and lawlessness that he forgot everything else.

Fred Russell sat constantly by the bedside of the helpless old man, administering with pleasure to his wants. He frequently met Ike, but they never spoke of the past; their lips were tacitly closed upon that epoch they gladly would have forgotten.

* * * * * "I am going away to-day," said Ike brusquely, as he entered the house as Fred left it to advise with some one of the "ranchmen."

"Going away!" exclaimed the invalid, as his eyes flew open with astonishment.

Mr. Loraine was some stronger this morning than he had been in several days, and he was determined to arraign Ike Ancil before him as a culprit.

"Yes, I will take the stage north this morning," carelessly responded Ike.

"Have a seat. I want a few words with you before you start," requested Mr. Loraine.

Ike obeyed reluctantly, as he stated, "I will have to leave in a few hours and will not have much time

for you. If you had been anxious for a consultation with me, you should have availed yourself of one of the many opportunities offered during the winter."

"Ike," began the old man, "I have longed for this opportunity; but, if you remember correctly, this is the first time you have been alone in my presence during your stay here."

Ike Ancil dropped his head with a cynical expression of astonishment and reflection, but he made no reply.

Mr. Loraine continued nervously:

"How are the people getting on in the East and North? You know I used to be a lover of politics, literature and the arts; but for about twenty years I have not seen a book or a newspaper."

Ike arched his eye-brows in feigned surprise as he said:

"When I get back to New York, I will have some papers mailed you. You should have made this remonstrance to me before and I would have seen that your wants were supplied."

"Yes," murmured the old gentleman despondently, "we had not heard from you in ten years until your sudden arrival last December. Ike, I can't think you have been unconsciously blind to my deprivation, or to the abhorrence I have to this secluded life which I am forced to endure without even an explanation."

A dark, troubled scowl came over Ike's face, as a puzzled, disapproving scintillation shone in his eyes. Again he sat speechless as his heart rankled with hatred and prejudice towards all pure and honest men. A man's heart may be grown over with the callous burr of desecration until the sanctuary of conscience is closed to all admittance, yet the eye will glow with impressions it caught while the soul was dying to all moral conviction and sinking into the incorrigible waters of hopelessness. Ike Ancil had lost all respect for the higher impulses of human condition, and, unfortunately for him, his face was the outward expression of inward purposes. During the generating and developing process of his character the lineaments o

his face were stereotyped with such phlegmatic expressions as symbolized with wonderful inflexibility and distinctness the assimilating work within.

As Ike Ancil sat beside the bed of his victim if he did not feel it, he seemed the picture of guilt.

“He swears, but he is sick at heart;
He laughs, but he turns deadly pale;
His ruthless eye and sudden start—
These tell the dreadful tale
That will be told.”

But these ringing, moral reproofs, or any amount of illustrative lectures, would not have convinced him that he had ever committed a crime against man or God. He had all the instincts of moral turpitude, of a guilty soul, but his self-conceit and his transcendent love of self were so uppermost in his thoughts that none of his suggestions or acts, however foul, ever met a disapprobating sanction. His heart and hands were crimson with the worst plots and deeds, but he never realized it with an acknowledged sense of guilt.

Edmond Loraine, observing the restless expression in his eyes, continued:

“I do not want to detain you unnecessarily long; but there is something in the past which I want to know. I have asked Fred, but he absolutely refuses to talk with me on the subject.”

“Go ahead,” frowned Ike, as Mr. Loraine paused for breath.

“I am in a strange condition, the cause of which I am unable to state. I am a wreck physically and mentally. A number of years ago I fell asleep—a strong, healthy man of my age; when I awoke my surroundings were changed. I was lying here in this bed a helpless, emaciated invalid; since then I have been trying to solve the problem of its cause. My mind is never clear, and I cannot think with that mental vigor necessary to a full realization of my situation. Frequently I find myself groping in the labyrinthian shadows of hopeless bewilderment.”

“What have I to do with all this?” interposed Ancil impatiently.

"There are certain transactions which you would keep concealed from me," Mr. Loraine said firmly.

"What right have you to demand of me a detailed account of my transactions, whether social or business?" rejoined Ike arrogantly.

"Ike Ancil, I knew you when you were a boy—I know you now—that means something to you, don't it?" hissed Mr. Loraine triumphantly.

"You propound enigmas," snarled Ancil.

"Maybe I do; but I will try to make you understand me. You were a poor boy—now you are a Cræsus. By what means have you obtained so much wealth?"

"Your question is not a pertinent one, Mr. Loraine. If this is the motive you have in detaining me, I must excuse myself," declared Ancil, annoyed at the question. He wished then that he had buried Ed. Loraine before he shipped him to Texas.

"Hold!" ejaculated Mr. Loraine at the highest key of his voice. "I have more to say to you. What became of my sister's children and their immense wealth? You know all about this matter, and I demand an unequivocal statement from you concerning it."

"Your insinuations are an insult, and were you not an old man—an invalid—you would answer for them to me this moment. I will state that your little nieces are both dead. As I was not appointed their guardian, I know nothing of the immense wealth you say they possessed," he asserted boisterously.

Edmond Loraine retained his self-possession; he rubbed his hands across his head as if trying to lift a veil from his mind; he looked straight into Ike's face as he said:

"I am in *your* possession—and I was *their* guardian. I do not understand it. I can't recall enough of the past to explain the mystery."

"Edmond Loraine, I cannot endure these insults any longer; and I have too much respect for your gray hairs to strike you. I must bid you 'good-bye,'" he replied stiffly.

"Ike Ancil, go, and I will put the 'boys' out after you to-night. I will charge you with fraud and have you arrested. I must have an explanation."

Ancil seated himself again; an apathetic smile curved his lips. He saw and realized his predicament with wonderful coolness, but he was too old himself to be out-generated by Mr. Loraine. It had been many years since necessity had compelled him to call into action those subtle, conspiracy making organs which had served him in consummating successfully the diabolical schemes which had enriched him in this world; but Mr. Ancil was at home; he was enlisted in the special vocation of his life. There were as many ways out from under these charges as there were modes of deception or deeds of crime. When trouble and danger began to lower on the horizon of his life, prompt, speedy action was the only antidote he ever used to counteract their threatening.

"Away then! work with boldness and with speed," he said, as he made a sweeping effort to check the coming torrent which proposed to engulf him in defeat, and disclose the guarded secrets of his heart. As he looked upon the imbecile, prostrate man, where he had been for twenty years, he did not even think who was responsible for it, or how deeply he had been wronged. The one question in his mind was, "How shall I deepen the cast of inhumanity and gain another victory over justice?"

After a few moments of painful silence, he began:

"Mr. Loraine, I am a dangerous man when I become enraged with anger. In my cooler moments I would respect your age; but, tantalized and insulted as I am this morning, I am desperate enough to forget your position and do my worst." He spoke the last sentence with his teeth champing in fiercest anger.

Mr. Loraine remained calm, as he replied:

"Ike, I know I have not long to live, even under the tenderest care, and so far as my life is concerned, it is beyond your power to shorten or prolong it very much. When you came to my house a poor orphan boy, as I believed, begging for a pillow on which to

lay your head, I mistrusted you. You never impressed me as worthy of encouragement or sympathy; but, after I had given you shelter for a week, I could not drive you away. Ike, this is the end of it. There has been a deep, a damnable collusion practiced upon me in some way, and you are the instigator of it. Why should you have taken the trouble to have brought me a distance of two thousand miles, away from home and property, without my consent, and placed me in this uncivilized land, imprisoned and fettered in the shackles of disease and mental aberration, if not to perpetrate thievish and infernal robbery? Do not scowl and betray so much of that malignant, demoniacal nature which has triumphed over your life, for it will not clear you or render you oblivious to the past. You are a guilty man, and you cannot deny it. You never thought my mind would gather its present strength; but the Lord has spared me for this hour's work. You will not tell me about the little girl's property because you stole it. Fred Russell knows all this, but he is repentant. He said you were the man who could tell me about the past."

Here Ike interrupted with a bitter oath for Fred, as he said incoherently: "Yes, I might have known the skulking, white-livered pup would betray me. I shall have him ground into mince-meat yet. A traitor, a recreant villain! Cursed be the name and death to his foul, disreputable existence. There is no invective or obloquy too virulent for his crime. Whatever crime I have committed, I have never yet sacrificed my sacred honor!

" 'Lies it within
The bounds of possible things that I should link
My name to that word—traitor?"

"Fred Russell, you must answer to me this day for this sneakish deception. You do not deserve a place among men."

"Thou art a traitor and a miscreant;
Too good to be so, and too bad to live,"

and by the gods of death, you shall forfeit your life.

My objects have been foiled by human power, never; and I register an oath they shall not be to-day. Edmond Loraine, you give more boldness to your speech than I ever want to hear again. If you knew wherein your interest lay, you would keep still. You may rest assured that I will never give you any explanation concerning the past. My lips are silent—forever sealed upon that subject, and so shall others be, if it takes death to quiet them.”

Ike Ancil became very much embittered at his confederate, Fred Russell, when he understood Mr. Loraine to state that Fred had insinuated suspicious things about him. He misconstrued what Mr. Loraine stated and, under the false impression, burst out into a fury of invectives against Fred.

Strange how a guilty man will take exceptions and confess his guilt, when there is not the slightest reference made to him. Upon every occasion he will let his self-conceit control his words and actions to the extent that always justifies himself to the condemnation of others. All desperate characters have a sacred pledge which they call “upon honor.” Ike Ancil was not unlike the rest. There were certain things which he would not do, and anybody that did do them became obnoxious to him. He prated his “honor” before his associates with a great deal of assurance and verbosity. He never associated with pure and truly great men; he despised the truly good; while he always applauded the rabid.

He was as destitute of honor as a brute is of a soul: his affirmations upon this subject were but an empty play upon words. He did not intend killing Fred Russell, if he could make his escape from Texas without any molestation. He would sacrifice his Texas property rather than be exposed to the difficulties which Mr. Loraine and Fred could decree: but he resolved in his heart to fight to the bitter end, rather than subject himself to the slightest humiliation. His heart rankled with the poison of indignation, and his nature was in a flame of burning disgust with himself for ever having trusted the cowardly Russell.

"Ike," faintly whispered the astonished old gentleman, "I knew you were the man, though Fred did not say so. When the intuitive whisper of a man's divine nature warns him, in the still hours of reflection, of his worst foes, he may depend upon its truth in opposition to the voice of reason as heard from external manifestations. Ike, I do not believe the children are dead. Your story is but an ingenious device to deceive me, ——"

"You know as much about that as you will ever know, so shut your mouth," interrupted Ike, greatly annoyed.

"It may be so; but if I do not live to bring you to a just account of your crimes, I have friends that will. There are men alive in the world who love justice—whose aspirations are to protect their fellow-man from the malicious, designing sharks who are ever ready to clutch the honest, credulous man in their long, saffron talons. Escape from your sins is impossible. If you do not suffer in one way you will in another, and——"

Ike, again interrupting, said: "My life is my own, whatever my destiny may be, and if you don't immediately cease your meddling, I will put something down your throat that will coerce you into measure."

Ike had endured all his patience would bear; he realized with a feeling of deep unpleasantness the truth of what the old man said. He reflected to himself as he suspiciously glanced into Mr. Loraine's face:

"Come what may, this day's work must be done well. Old man, say your prayers. Ike Ancil has never yet committed murder with his own hands, but the dark passions which inflame his bosom now are hellish enough to steel him for this—the most damnable of all crimes. You old knave! I have always detested and despised you! It would have been far better for you to have left this day's story untold. You have pulled the cord in my nature which will dye my hands in your gore. Magnificent fool! to think I would leave you breathing on your bed of skins to publish with vehement affirmation what you think I

have done! It is better to die wise in your own estimation than to live a fool—a mountebank in the eyes of the world. There is too much for me to live for to have my plans thwarted this easily in life. I have nothing to do but to remove the last trace of evidence there remains to effectually cover up the secrets of the past. The living witnesses of my crime are here,—why leave them to breathe curses and odium against me? I will not do my work with a knife or a pistol; I have more subtle means to invite death.”

He arose from his seat, opened his valise, took from it a small vial marked ‘chloral,’ which he kept from Mr. Loraine’s view. As he took his seat he resumed his reflections:

“I will give the old hornet a dose by force. It will secure his death without engendering the least suspicion of foul play.”

A pale, swarthy figure stood at the door, watching with breathless interest, the whole proceeding.

Ed. Loraine broke in upon Ancil’s reflections: “Ike, where are my children? Did you murder them!”

“No; but I will murder you, you old devil,” he muttered as he sprang from his seat and grasped Mr. Loraine’s neck with his long slender fingers.

But before he could drop the deadly drug into the gaping mouth, a pale, enraged man had entered the door, and, with panther-like ferocity and activity, sprang to the rescue of the wronged man, ejaculating as he stayed the murderous hand, with a death-like voice:

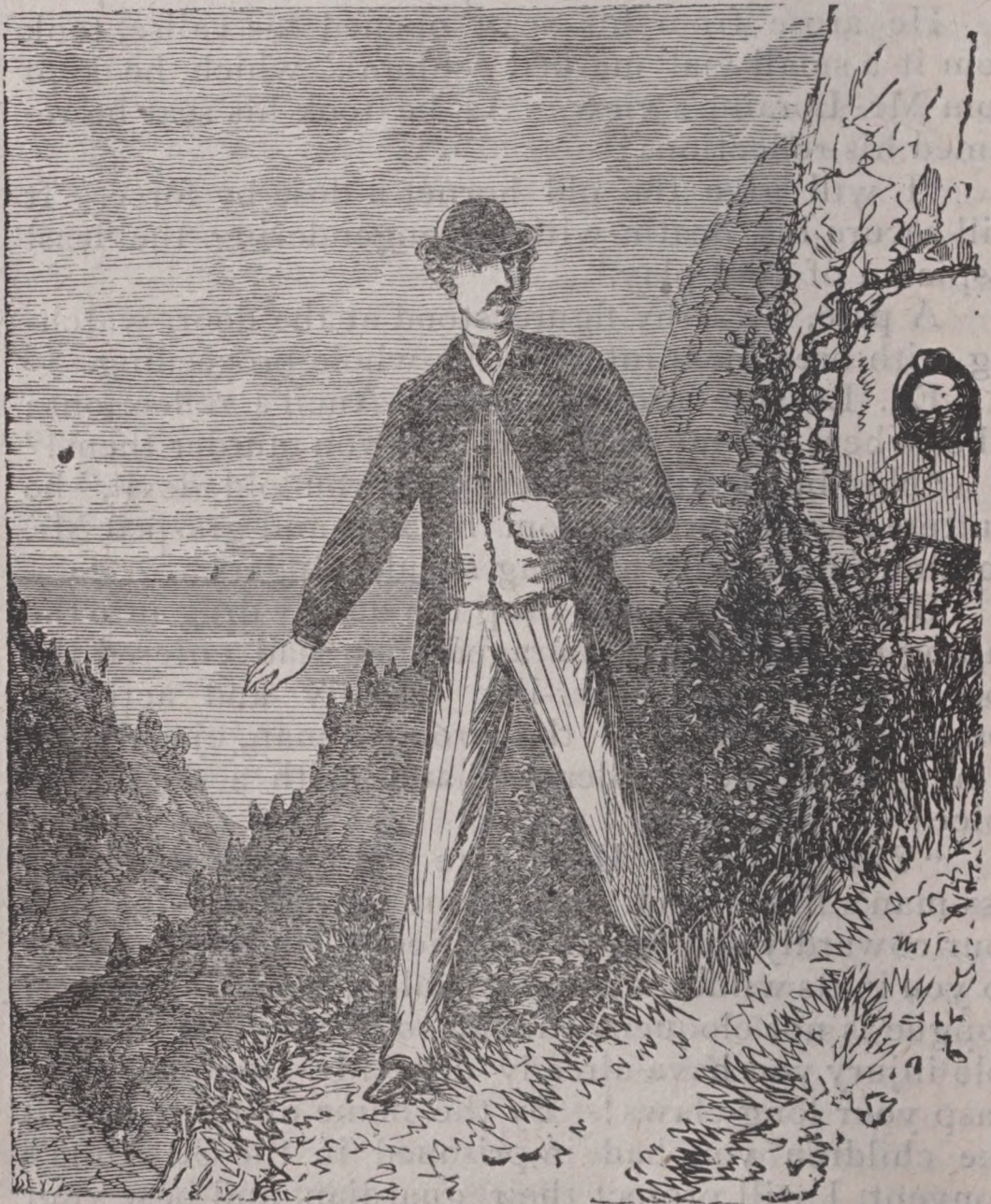
“Villain, stop! How dare you to take this helpless man’s life? You are a giant murderer,—feasting your cowardly soul upon pigmies! Hell will envelop you in its wildest and most soul-excruciating flames. Tongue is not eloquent enough to portray the irreparable injury you have already done Mr. Loraine. Unclasp your long claws! By the name of those angel-like children you had imprisoned in the St. Anna’s Convent, I will protect their guardian, and bow your head with the deepest infamy. You have been a truculent criminal, a freebooter and a culprit, until

outraged and insulted justice is on your path searching; and soon the bloodhound, Ate, will ensnare you into her meshes."

"Hold! traitorous miscreant! My oath is law," cried Ike harshly as he released his hold upon Mr. Loraine's neck, to prepare for a combat with Fred.

A dull heavy thud sounded and Fred lay prostrate upon the floor, wounded unto death.

Ancil excitedly left the house, mounted a small pony and rode rapidly away.



HE MET A WEARIED, LONE PEDESTRIAN, WHO
TURNED AND LOOKED AFTER HIM.

Not far from the scene of murder, he met a wearied, lone pedestrian who turned and looked after him in strange surprise.

Ike Ancil never once thought of Mr. Loraine after Fred's arrival; if he had retained his usual self-possession, he would have completed his bloody work with splendid success. A few minutes after the clash of the pistol had died away, Ed. Loraine raised himself upon his elbows and looked around the room; a horrible sight met his eyes. Fred Russell lay with his face downward, dead to all appearances. The blood issuing from mouth and nose had eddied into little pools on the floor.

"The scoundrel has killed him," groaned Mr. Loraine as his strength gave away and he fell back upon the bed in complete exhaustion. He felt that if he had not been so bold in accusing Ike, he would not have proposed murder.

"Fred is gone," he thought. "Who will look after me now? He may have wronged me, but he grew sorry and endeavored to repair the injury by a life of devotion and self-sacrifice. I wish some strong, active and justice-loving man would hunt the black-hearted criminal down. Oh! if I could just remember! I can almost get the broken story. Ah! it vanishes from me like a myth. I have it,—no, it is gone! It is just beyond the reach of memory—reminding me of a forgotten name. I verily believe my reason is returning. Along the dark ports of mystery I see the gray gleams of returning light. No! no! it is all dark again. Is it death's murmur? The light is almost gone. I hear the storm-beating winds, the rumbling sound of distant thunder; there is no breeze afloat on the air. What is it I hear? It is the herald of a mighty revolution. The sound is going away again—the storm is not coming. The light! the light! Ah! I believe my mind is going to lose its incumbrances.

"Already I am upon my mother's knee—here comes my father; there is our old home with its sacred spots,—my school-days and my school-mates.

My sister—she is kneeling before the marriage altar. Here is all my past—that which I have labored to recall for twenty years. Oh, horrors! what is this I see on the sea of life? There is Ike Ancil and Fred Russell administering opiates to me. They think my mind is lost in the realms of delirium; but I am just in that unconscious state in which the mind sees with keener vision, while the body is paralyzed to all sensibility. But, mercy! what gulf upon whose verge I stand? A chasm of misery, mental aberration, darkness and despondency; fitful gleams of memory, hatred, self-possession—what a mixture of gall with human life! But I have endured it all. Holy saints! Liberty! I am free!” he shouted aloud as he again lifted himself in the bed.

This time his eyes flashed upon the face of a tall, handsome figure that stood in the doorway with his eyes fixed upon the man on the floor.

The stranger stood, apparently not hearing the old man's exclamation, so intently did he look upon the face on the floor swathed in its own blood. He had the bearing and appearance of a cultured gentleman; he had a high forehead, ample in breadth; a face symmetrical in its outlines, illumined by a clear, dark eye, softened by a sad and worn expression. His consciousness of the presence of another directed his eyes around the room until they fell upon Mr. Loraine. Astonished and awed by the presence of such a person at such a scene, he moved back to regain his self-possession.

Mr. Loraine observing his confusion and trepidation, questioned:

“Who are you?”

“My name is Raymond Humphrey,” answered the stranger courteously, trying to attitudinize himself to comfort; then instantly, involuntarily, without a word, stepped over the soiled floor and bowed himself over the prostrate form of Fred Russell.

CHAPTER XII.

In gentle love the sweetests joys we find ;
Yet even those joys dire jealousy molests,
And blackens each fair image in our breasts,

The understanding of man has as many constructions with which to interpret the great lessons culled from observation, as the human heart has sources of disappointment and deprivation. The happiness of the world has to some extent for its foundation the marked differences of opinion exercised with reference to taste and preference. It is essentially true that there is a great uniformity of ideas upon moral and political subjects ; but even here, where society and the power of government are assailed, there is a wide variance if confined to private interpretation.

The science of nature examined from the page of human rights interdicts man from thinking for himself upon questions for which he is not specially designed as a leader ; arguing with effectual grace that, if freedom of speech and action is granted, the various conflicting passions and designs would launch the race into confusion and anarchy.

Nations are cemented into a felicitous and harmonious society of union, not by any original conception of patriotism, but by principles fought for, and held sacred by their fathers. Law is consistent, having for its primordial and fundamental aims, reason and justice. Human nature is a conglomeration of contravening foibles, having for its aim selfishness, regardless of equity, law or reason. For this cause man is incapacitated for making his own decrees, and is required to yield himself a servant to the governing principles which reason has enunciated as being just and consistent with the demands of every occasion.

Before there can be a universal standard of right, all men must give their moral assent to the belief of certain rites and dogmas, and until a stride of this proportion has been taken in search for unity, there will be bitter division and ceaseless strife. While there are some things touching the general welfare of

humanity, it is essential for men to agree about, there are other things touching the special welfare of a single individual, on which a unity of tastes and opinions would wreck the lives of an army of men.

Prejudice feeds the mouth of political factions. The religious faith of a mother is received as a sacred obligation by the child. Volition moves men into decision and makes them heroes or failures; but jealousy and love come without reason, will or prejudice, tyrannizing over nature, making physical, social and often moral wrecks. It has been an often propounded question to the student of human nature, "How the human race can be so numerous and each person have a distinct individuality, both in character and sensibility?"

Every solution offered to this question by the ingenuity of man, has been clouded with cabalism and resolves the question back to its primary basis. These mysteries in occult science, belonging more especially to the province of Infinite Mind, reproduce themselves with equal distinctness upon the social lineaments and flexibility of the soul; giving man a disposition peculiarly his own, apart and detached from all others when circumscribed to the limits of sensation whether pleasant or painful.

Love has its own individuality; a substitute cannot appease its famishing hunger; every heart must drink from the fountain for which it thirsts, if its wants are realized. A change of will does not counteract the psychological impression of the heart, but it inflames and consumes it with the most cruel torture. Woman or man from a high sense of virtue and modesty may crush young Cupid to a sense of perfect security while in his infancy; but as he thrusts his magnetic thrills into a full, impassioned nature, long valued honor, cold and proud virtue, bend until their obdurate fetters burst asunder, flooding the souls with such gleams of delight as prejudices the judgment and establishes the heart a throne of love where its king or queen must forever rule with unyielding tyranny.

Iris Earle's life had been as placid as a tranquil sea with now and then a mild breeze rippling its deep blue waters. While a child, when other children wanted new dresses or childish articles, she never murmured; she was always content with what she had. While other women were annoyed with capricious whims, and half the time in a splenetic frenzy, she was the one calm, lovable Iris. She never permitted herself to gossip or to become interested in Madame Rumor. The prayer, which the breeze hourly caught from her lips and wafted up to heaven, was that all men should have the conscientious needs of their hearts. She endeavored never to think evil of any one; but, being endowed with a fine intuition, this was the occasion of some warring with herself.

She had slightly opposed her sister's marriage with Mr. Allen, and never became fully reconciled, because she realized their married life was a verification of her apprehension. They were not happy together, she knew they could never be; however, she believed a change would come, proving all things had worked for the best. But love came to her at last, and she forgot all but her own happiness. Then she began to live a different life to what she had ever done before; the heart took hold of those little pleasures and hopes which must be enjoyed clandestinely, while external circumstances and interests are not invited to participate.

The day came—as it must come to all who truly love—when the chalice of happiness was mingled with gall and she drank to the bitter lees. With the first knowledge that she loved came the first pang of intense grief. Jealousy inflamed her mind with such a fume that reason lost her sway and love its kindness. After she beheld the unfortunate scene in the summer house, she went to her room, unconscious of everything except that she loved Raymond Humphrey with every heart beat, and hated her sister as poison. The sadness and anguish of a lifetime rushed upon her in an unexpected moment, crushing life, in its new-born happiness, into hopeless nothingness.

The loathsome passion, which none but the spotless ermine of woman's conscience can feel, rancored in her bosom like a mighty cobra, biting and distilling its virus at every rage; she was shocked and horrified, but there was a deeper wound than offended modesty, a treacherous sister had stolen her love and appropriated it to her own ungodliness—that sister had one husband, and that fact ought to be a finger of warning to her interference with other men.

Iris tried to believe her distress was the outgrowth of the shock she received on learning her sister was weak enough to stoop to such conduct; but her premises were wrong, and she could never satisfy herself with such reasoning. If Iris had not loved Raymond, she would have been very indignant and much horrified at Lois; she would never have been driven to that misery and desperation, to that burning rancor with which she disdained those ties that made them dear to each other in a sister's love; she would have gone to her with heart burning with deep anxiety and sympathy to persuasively plead with her to discontinue her conduct; as a reason she would have pointed her to God and the awful consequences of not continuing in the way where His promises may be found.

It was different now. She was too deeply mortified and chagrined to rest; she walked the floor of her boudoir until the air grew suffocating, then she would walk the magnificent hall, never pausing to look at the frowning statues which cast their cold gleams from every nook, nor the saintly pictures which ornamented the walls. She was unconscious of her many steps. Mr. Wellington had asked where Lois was—she shook her head; she could not speak; that name fell upon her ears like the hiss of a serpent, and stung her heart with the viper of jealousy until the green virus coursed her veins in boiling fury. Before she knew Mr. Humphrey she had never loved any one but Lois. They had been two orphan sisters married in devotion to each other; one never had a want but what the other tried to supply it. Every

one knew them as the "twin sisters," and believed that they lived in each other.

When Iris became exhausted in her grief, she threw herself across the bed in wild despair. Her silken lashes soon kissed the tear-stained and swollen cheek in sleep. It was a frightful, delirious sleep that came to her. All night horrible phantasms and ghostly apparitions of wildest fancy played around her in portentous array.

"O, Lois!" she would exclaim from her dreams, "my only sister, why did you do so? You have ruined our life. No change can come which will replace the honor you have sold, and repair the injury you have done me. Your face is the counterpart of mine; but, beneath the external physique of humanity, there is an inner being from which emanates our true existence. O! think not I'm made of marble and stone, and cannot love as well as you. He was mine—not of choice, not of pleasure—but because heaven willed it; and you—O! you perfidious, false sister, stole him from me;" such were her murmurings all night.

About eleven o'clock Norman bore Lois in his arms to her door and knocked; she never heard him. He decided it might be best not to disturb her, and withdrew his call for admittance.

Lois soon aroused from her swoon, perceiving she was in her own room, inquired faintly:

"How came we here?"

"I brought you," Norman answered.

"Where is it? O! what was it? Mr. Wellington, I am affrighted," she said impetuously.

"I do not know, Lois, who it was; but I know what it was. It was a woman with bright, shining hair like Berenice. Rest yourself upon this point that it was a real person. Control, yourself; she cannot harm you. I will see that all the doors are securely closed. When I go down, if she has not taken her exit, I will make an effort to get some information from her," he said as he prepared to go.

"Please do not go down stairs any more to-night. I will feel safe without it. That must be a mad wo-

man and she would harm you, if you attempted to molest her. Won't you promise?" she entreated.

"Yes, Lois; I will do anything you advise. Your will is the most persuasive logic I have ever known. I want no better reason for a deed than it," he smiled.

A soft, pleasant light came into her eyes as she playfully asked:

"Do you love me so much?"

"Yes, and more. Do you doubt it?" he returned.

"No; I could not question your word. If you say so, I believe it; but I fear it is so abundant now that it will waste away, and in a few years you will cease to love me," and a sweet laugh rippled over her lips.

"Lois," he said earnestly, "I pledged my love to-night by the stars; it will be as eternal as they are. In going back over the history of myself, I have firm and tangible assurances of my own constancy. You know sometimes a person can divine their opinion upon a given theme at any point in the future by the circumstantial data of the past and present. But, Lois, our separation is liable to occur at any time at your choice. You shake your head now—but let us leave the question for time to determine. I believe you love me—will always do so—but I think the time will come when pride and your predominant wish for your own happiness, regardless of mine, will suggest that you may be happier without it. When the time comes, all the explanation you will condescend to give me will be, 'The whole affair is sin, and you are going to do better.' At the time you come to this conclusion, you will doubtless believe that you are acting under the inspiration of pure motives; but the whole of your proceedings will be but the vague hope of ameliorating your condition without direct reference to the sin which you have committed."

"Mr. Wellington," she said, "how can you love such a character as you portray me?"

"Lois, darling," he said softly, "I do not want to say anything unkind. I was only giving an outline of human nature when inwardly photographed. Whatever contradictory frailties I may find in your

nature will not counteract my love. My heart is conditioned against possibilities, fickleness and a certain amount of vacillation. So, whatever character the future may develop for you, my fate is fixed. Will you not let time prove your love?" he said as he kissed her good-night.

She faintly whispered, "Yes."

Lois passed a night of quiet repose. She had inured herself to whatever irregularities there might be in loving the man to whom she was not married.

* * * * *

"Iris, love, what are you so gloomy about this morning?" she asked as they were leaving the dining hall after breakfast on the following morning.

"I am not quite well," she answered in an evasive tone.

"You looked quite ill yesterday when I saw you," added Norman, turning to Iris.

"You must not get sick, Iris. We will go to Saratoga next month," said Lois soothingly as they all entered the drawing-room.

"I will remain at home this summer," she replied curtly.

"Not with my consent. I have never been from home without you, and I am too old to begin new habits now," laughed Lois as she asked herself, "what has come over Iris to make her so moody.

"I will see Humphrey in town this evening, and I will prevail on him to go," said Norman, apparently with little concern.

At the mention of this name Iris instantly fixed her eyes upon Lois to see if her expression would change. It did change. All the light and color departed from her face, leaving it pale with shame. This Iris misinterpreted, and her soul became more bitter as she thought of what she had seen.

"At any event, I will stay at home," said Iris faintly, fearing to trust herself to say much.

"Well, Humphrey will too. He affirms your home shall be his," explained Norman with a laugh.

"I am very fortunate to not be left alone," she sighed.

"I will remain with you," returned Lois, attempting to regain her self-possession.

Iris again misconstruing her language, flashed an ironical retort :

"I will, of course, understand the sacrifice is for me."

"Why certainly, sister. Your tone gives your words into a meaning which I am sure I do not understand," replied Lois, a troubled expression upon her face.

"Let us all *stay* or *go*," observed Norman, endeavoring to conclude the subject.

"Iris must know I would not leave her," replied Lois with wounded love.

"People do not know much now when every one is for self," said Iris as she clasped her hands in painful agony.

"Iris, sweet," said Lois tenderly as she changed her seat for one at her sisters side : unclasping the locked hands and taking them in hers, she continued :

"What is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"No; I just didn't rest well last night, but will soon be myself again," she said as she shrank in faint rebellion from Lois' caresses.

If Lois could have peered into the bleeding heart, and read the last twenty hours' proceedings as recorded there, she would have applied the only remedy which possessed the curative properties necessary to a complete restoration of health.

How often could we make ourselves the benefactor of a friend, if we only knew for what the poor grief-stricken and starving heart was yearning. There are but few people who wish to appear unkind ; but there are many who are very unkind.

Lois would not have said or done an unkind thing to Iris for her own heart's love ; but unconsciously and unintentionally she placed herself in an unfortunate position which was the direct means of obliterating from her sister's life the last cherished

hope of happiness her heart could conjecture. There are events which come into our history without any special reason or design, rushing themselves upon the will with such suddenness that results are not anticipated. If a person always knew whom his words or acts had touched that a confession of purpose might be made, the innocent would always exculpate themselves.

Lois Allen had by one thoughtless act, made two hearts miserable and wretched beyond description. She had torn them from the highest order of love, hope and bliss, and dropped them into the pit of gloom and aching despair. She was unconscious of it all. No voice of warning was whispered into her ear from within, rendering her uncomfortable without stating or implying the cause. There is nothing to condemn Lois, or to justify her; her conduct was thoughtless, unadvised, of accidental consequences. It was one of those cases in which fate planted the seed and reaped the harvest.

Iris was blessed with a very tender and compassionate nature, but she could hate under the influence of offended pride, as well as love and forgive in cooler moments.

At first, when her wound was fresh, she thought she could never endure her sister's presence again; but rest came, her mind began to seek for its normal condition, and with the reaction her bitterness assuaged to that extent that she resolved to live outwardly as she had done in the past. This was a more difficult task than she expected. She was young especially in experience with the emotions that grow out of a sorrowful heart.

"Why didn't you send for me, when you found you were not going to rest well?" replied Lois lovingly, without heeding Iris' aversion.

"You were in the garden until late last night," she said with a coldness characteristic of the occasion.

The reply was a trenchant one that cut into Lois' heart like a razor of death; she turned even paler than she had been; her heart fluttered with a ter-

rible fear as she thought of her sister as a spy; but the idea scarcely had birth ere she disclaimed it.

Norman in the meanwhile had been looking at the two faces with a studious mind. "Two faces a fac-simile of each other, not a trace of discernible difference in their outward appearance, and both sweet and lovable in disposition. Dress them alike, place them before their mirror, and except by some external motion or position, they would be unable to know each other apart,—the same in all respects except there are two persons. What man could love one without loving the other?"

At this point in his reflections he examined his heart to see if he did not also love Iris; he found nothing akin to his passion for Lois.

"How is it" he continued a little mystified as if the idea had never dawned upon him before, "that I have chosen to love Lois—another man's wife—while there is Iris whom I could love without shame, and wed with pride? Certainly if I love one I can love the other. I will think upon this subject. If I find it possible, I will submit the facts to Lois and act upon her suggestion. This would be no retraction of love; it would be loving one for another's likeness."

At this juncture, Sambo, a trusty negro of the place, appeared in the door.

Lois released Iris' hands as her face brightened with curiosity.

"What is it?" questioned Norman, as Sambo stood with one hand in his pocket the other holding the hat he had so politely doffed, his eyes glistening with bewilderment, his mouth disfigured with an ugly, foolish grin.

Massa, Massa, and both Misses, dis yar nigger is not dreamin, and, by de holy Saints, aint had any cider, but I wish dis yar nigger was in hebben—Massa, how you gwine to git yerself to recebe dis yar nigger's story wib eny crebence? But shore as de holy Moses cross de Red Sea wib a light before him and cloud behin' him, dis yar nigger seed.—Now yer's not gwine to belieb it——"

"Believe what?" interrupted Norman with a curious smile.

"Gib Sambo time, and he come to der pint. I neber dreamed dis I'm gwine to tell. I's not alive if ebery word not so. Its wonders to yer white folks if yer belieb it, kase I'm gwine to tell fax. Sambo seed wib his eyes wide open as dey is dis minit,——"

"Sambo, tell us what you have seen?" exclaimed Lois, her face pale as death and her eyes shining like stars.

"Dar, Missus, yer all have got no pashuns wib an ole nigger. I's fining out dis yar's a big untakin fur ole Sambo to quaint you wib what he wish he neber seed. I spec I'm gwine to commit de orful sin gin de holy sperit."

"Uncle Sambo, tell us about it. I will believe your story," interrupted Iris in a fatigued voice.

"Dar, Miss, I dunn, which one yer is—yer is so much like one anudder dat I can't tell yer apart. Lawza me, dis yer nigger needs killin'; he scered de missuses alweddy till dar faces as white as a cottin patch."

"Sambo, don't give any more preliminaries, but let us hear what you came to tell us," said Norman authoritatively.

"Well, Massa, yer wud not belieb me if I gwine ter state de fax at once. Do yer all belieb in sperits?"

"Yes, Sambo, Haven't you got a spirit?" asked Norman, almost overcome with Sambo's ludicrous gestures.

"Yes, sar; of course dis nigger got a sperit; but dat's beggin de quesshun agin der issure I's tryin to raise fur dispute."

"What kind of spirits are you talking about?" asked Norman.

"Dar now; trying 'plex Sambo. Eberbody knows dar's libin' sperits."

"But who would be afraid of dead spirits?" said Norman, trying to confuse Sambo more.

"Oh! Massa, dat's a little onfair to obstruct dis nigger wib yer larnin. I's got clare of'en de queshun

now; if yer all had let me 'lone, I'se had yer head a swimmin' hot wib curosty."

"Mr. Wellington; do not interrupt Sambo. Let's hear what he has to tell," interposed Lois.

"Yes-um," bowed Sambo, until he almost touched the floor.

"My ole Missy alus wer considerin' for me, case she knew I knowd nothin' of siens. Law help me der saints! I'se gittin' square off de trac agin."

Sambo dropped his eyes to the floor in wistful thought, trying to remember for what he had come. Suddenly, his mind awakening, he began:

"I knows yer's gittin' 'nuf of hints and itchin' tur de pure, blank trufe, and dat's what Sambo's gwine ter tell. Yes; Massa, stay still till I get fru wib it. But upon my soul, fore de whites and blacks, dis place am ha'nted. Mighty God uf heben, hab mercy upon dis poor black soul, if it taint so. Misses, I'se sinnin' to tell ye, case yer can't breve easy here."

"How do you know it is haunted?" asked Norman.

"If Massa had looked whar dis nigger saw,—I's scered to eben fink uf it—a ghost—we all saw it. None uf us sleep de whole night. Men uf ole Isreal, keep eyes 'way frum me, it dese aint de fax! I stan' subject to correction if I debiate. But, I's bin larned dat all trabelin frum der grave er like women, and war dresses. Dis here were like all de rest I eber herd 'bout."

Well, Sambo, what did you learn about it? Did you talk to it any?" said Norman, as he glanced across the room to where Lois and Iris sat as motionless as statues.

Sambo did not reply instantly, as it required a moment for him to recover from the astonishment which Mr. Wellington's question produced,—to think that he would have so little sense as to speak to a ghost!

"Great heben, Massa, yer fink dis yer nigger los' what little sense he did had,—to go 'bout speakin' to sperits. I's seed one. I sware fore God dat's all I know 'bout it."

"What did it look like?" gasped Iris.

"I 'clare 'fore God, yer got me again. Kase I never seed nuthin' anyways like it since I been born," replied Sambo, as the perspiration poured down over his inky face.

"I think you have told us about all you know about it now. May be you will see it again in a few days, when you will learn more about it," interposed Norman, with a laugh.

"Yes, sar; but sartin as I eber see it again I'll spoon away; sartin to do so, Massa. Yer neber see ole Sambo 'gin. Misses, I aint jes told yer dis ter 'cite yer into faintin'. I go now case yer face's looking scery."

"Keep on the watch," advised Norman, as Sambo took his departure with a gratified smile.

"It was certainly some weird phantasy of Sambo's mind," observed Iris, a little more interested than she was willing to confess.

"He certainly did not see any ghost," added Norman, as his mind lost itself in the thought of the pale, deathly face he saw in the moonlight.

Lois was too near overcome by the numerous facts that Sambo's conversation had suggested to her to participate in an analysis of what had been said. Her heart told her that some mysterious person was at Rosedale,—that the secret of her life was in their possession. She excused herself on some pretense and quickly passed up the long flight of stairs to her boudoir—a sad, distressed woman.

Norman and Iris spent the entire morning in conversation. They were neither happy nor entertained very pleasantly. The burdens, the heartaches, the silent, bitter regrets that they were forced to endure were strongly combative to all real pleasure. That day with several more slipped by on the golden wings of time, but not without distilling both joy and sadness.

Richard Allen had not been heard from for many months; some supposed he was dead; but Lois thought differently; knowing her husband's disposi-

tion, by means of a quick intuition she weighed with caution the possible surroundings that might prevent him from writing.

The report was widely circulated that Raymond Humphrey had disappeared very mysteriously, leaving his business to the care of the gods. Iris attributed his sudden, ill-advised conduct to the shame and self-reproach he bore for having permitted himself to love a woman who was already a wife. Her constant prayer and the strenuous effort she made to govern the involuntary emotions of her heart were objectively wrought that at some future time she might abridge the past with happier memories. The general aspect of her life had assumed its normal equanimity, carrying with it but slight traces of the slumbering fire within and the overpowering grief of the past; but along the contemplative avenue of meditation, while her soul was absorbed in communion with its own environments, a compulsory, spontaneous feeling would at times rise, in which her whole nature would be submerged into a paroxysm of irretrievable despair. In these painful retrospections the human soul in all its distortions and inconceivable shapes was photographed as a beautiful, inviting flower whose exhalations were fatal poison.

Norman cultivated her acquaintance with persistency, despite the repulsion he met from his own feelings. He had determined—with the resolution of human strength—to love her for her sister's sake, and in some metaphysical way expiate his actions from guilt; but this was a useless and fruitless task, except to convince and enlighten him of one thing—‘that man could not love whom and where he pleased;’ that it was not the outward symmetry and beauty of woman that aroused the one true love of the heart, but rather the inward disposition and divinely appropriated life whose charms encircled their external environment—or body—invisible to the external eye, like odoriferous particles only perceptible when brought in proximity to that peculiar sense adapted to their enjoyment. The heart—that sense which

must be touched or all love is but a fantastic chimera—is adapted to inhale the rich fragrance and beauty that emanates with so much exuberance from the mutual infatuation of love.

Lois and Iris were as distinct as white and black in their inner individuality. Not that one was a better type of true womanhood than the other, but that the requirements of one of their emotional and sentimental natures could not by the inherent law of appetites meet the response of the other. Each of their hearts possessed latent passions, which, when aroused, demanded something separate and apart from the other. To all external appearances they were the same, and there was no visible or plausible reason why, if a man loved one, he could not love the other; but the eyes of the soul no man can comprehend, for they see by inspiration; its voice is louder than reason, for it controls judgment.

Lois had become almost reconciled to her fate. She thought that she had not done so wrong after all; she administered consolation by believing she had not done anything more than any other woman would under the same circumstances. But still the white, pallid face haunted her. She tried to conceal herself from it in thoughts of her love for Norman; but that face had been daguerreotyped upon the diamond plate of her soul with such distinctness that memory would not close her portals.

One day near the last of June she repaired to the library alone, hoping to meet Norman; taking a seat near the large window that opened on the western balcony, she drew a sigh of disappointment as she found the room empty. As her thoughts drifted out upon the wide ocean of meditation, her eyes rested upon the beautiful green trees and vines that swayed so gracefully beneath a mild wind. She went back over her whole life, reviewing it with the same interest that one does a book they have read before.

"I have an unpleasant history," she thought; "one fraught with so many mistakes (not of a minor kind); but such as, when once consummated, bring

endless regret. I can never retract what I have done. Any apology I might offer to the world for it would be received with coldness and disdain. I am so gloomy this evening. I wish Mr. Wellington would come, we could have such a delightful hour in which to read together."

Suddenly she heard a footfall; her heart gave a pleasant bound. "It is he," she thought. Her face became radiant, as her eyes lighted with pleasure. In a moment some one was at the door. She called, "come in," and waited in sweet anticipation of the next moment, when Norman would be at her side. Observing there was no immediate response to her invitation she turned to know the cause. The color fled her cheek, the light flickered in her eyes, while her heart sank with disappointment and fear.

"Is it Iris or Lois? Don't you know me?" he said tenderly as he walked toward her.

Her lips did not move; she sat in speechless silence, while a tremor of horror convulsed her body.

CHAPTER XIII.

RICHARD ALLEN'S DILEMMA.

O wretched is the dame to whom the sound
 "Your lord has returned," no pleasure brings.

—Maturin's *Bertram*

I have not quailed to danger's brow
 When high and happy need I now?

—Byron's *Giaour*.

"Speak to me. Is it my wife?" he said persistently.

"Yes," she gasped faintly.

"How glad I am to see you," he exclaimed as he drew her into his arms and kissed her in rapid succession. He felt she was trying to withdraw from his embrace, and misinterpreting her motives he refrained from giving full expression to the wild impetuous

gladness that he felt on being at home again. He had often thought of Lois during his absence, and resolved when once more returned to her side he would make it his home. There had never been a warm, ardent demonstration of kindness on his part, but absence had cut the callous growth out of his heart and it was now filled with pleasanter feeling and higher aims as to home-life.

Though a man sinks to the lowest ebb in vice, he will not become indifferent to the charms and rest a happy home proposes. Richard Allen had long since cast off all remorse of conscience and steeped his soul in some of the blackest crimes that can soil the record of man. If we leave the visible prints of his life and take up that invisible thread along which passes the magnetic fluid that produces the inward man with his innumerable instincts, we will find but little good to record.

Though his absence had not exceeded seven or eight months, there were things which he encountered that, to a great extent revolutionized his future aims, inspiring him with serious and sentimental thoughts of his wife; as he neared home he pictured the pleasant welcome he would receive.

"Darling wife, have you been ill? You look so pale," he said as he smoothed her forehead with his hand.

"Yes I have, but I am quite well now," she spoke half audibly as she liberated her hands from his.

"Lois, do not be so apathetic. I will amply repay you in kindness for all I have forced you to suffer during my travels. Believe me I will love you as tenderly as ever a wife was loved. My wealth is at your disposal; seek your pleasure where you wish. I returned home to offer all I possess to you. Have you no welcome smile to give me?" he asked affectionately.

"I am glad you have come back; but I—I—I'm not worthy to receive you," she answered.

If Lois had known to what extent she compromised herself in even extending to Richard Allen the

courtesy of welcome, her heart would have shrunk from even speaking to him again. This is one instance where ignorance made life more contemplative by bridging over the irregularities of the past. She had partly recovered from the surprise that came like a fearful thunderbolt, and with it all came the thought that she ought never to receive Richard Allen as her husband again.

Marriage was a divine institution appointed by heaven for the protection of society—involving the unity of hearts in a most sacred pledge. She did not love Mr. Allen; they were foreign in nature and as antagonistic in their conception of life as it is possible for extremes to be. Married to a man you do not love—whose nature is coarse and offensive—whose life and character are a shock to modesty—to honor such is a desecration of the marriage altar, a prostitution of the heart, and the consummating act that will forever, irretrievably wreck two lives.

But Lois was like a great many other people in the world who say their theory is good, but they themselves are destitute of the resolution necessary to the accomplishment of the purpose and aims. Her intuition outlined the narrow road of virtue and prudence; but pride, regardless of reason, rebelled in its cold selfishness. She endeavored to suppress those unpleasant feelings which Mr. Allen's presence suggested. No! she would never profane what God had ordained, or cast reflection upon it. She promised herself to discharge faithfully her duty towards her husband; that to the world she would be a loving, cheerful, devoted wife. Over a sorrowful heart a happy smile would always part her lips.

"Good-evening, Mr. Allen," said Norman as he came brusquely into the room.

"You are looking much improved, Wellington. How have you been?" returned Mr. Allen as he arose and took Norman's hand.

"O, we have had a delightful time. But, Mr. Allen, this is quite a surprise to me. Why have you not

written? We thought evidently you were dead," responded Norman.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Allen. "Then you were going to make Rosedale your permanent home."

Norman blushed as his eyes involuntarily sought Lois. Her face was colorless and her eyes were fixed vacantly upon the floor. He hesitated before replying, thinking she would add a word.

"It was mutually agreed that I should remain until your return without any specified time as to when that should be. While the interference of Providence was not mentioned that is always implied."

"An evasive answer, Mr. Wellington. What do you say, my pet?" smiled Allen as he turned his eyes in affectionate admiration upon his wife.

"Mr. Wellington has been so very kind to us," she said as a faint smile lighted up her face, feigning an appreciation of the amiable epithet, but inwardly abhorring it.

"Then I made an excellent selection of a companion for Iris and you?" he asked without taking his eyes from her face.

"I haven't a complaint to make," she returned with an undertone of impatience.

"Where is Iris?"

"She is in the garden and will be in presently."

Then Mr. Allen turned his conversation to Norman.

"How have you managed affairs during my absence?" he questioned as he changed his seat.

Lois had been longing for an excuse to leave the room in order to regain her self-possession. This change of conversation into the dry details of business admitted it. Promising to return in a few minutes with some letters, she left the library. On gaining the privacy of her own apartments she gave way to the most violent sobs of grief. The sudden arrival of her husband had not given a moment to prepare for his coming. After some moments she arose from the sofa, declaring that she would steel her heart against the worst emergency;—that her secrets and sorrows

would, from that hour, be buried deep in the sunshine and cheerful smiles of an outwardly happy life. With this resolve uppermost in her mind she returned to the library, bearing a small pack of sealed letters.

Mr. Allen and Norman had amply discussed their private matters and were exchanging opinions on the recent events of the day.

"What detained you so long? Ah! you have gained some color in your face since you left. It seems to be real,—that is as contradistinguished from the bloom of youth," Mr. Allen jokingly remarked as he held his hand for the letters.

"It is the real bloom and it takes time to procure it," she smiled as her soft eyes fell upon Norman's meditative face. Her heart sickened with almost deadly fear as she thought of their relationship. The chief thought in her mind was, "Will he quit loving me? He knows I have a husband whom duty binds me to own and accept. He has always known it; but until now its importance and greatness, as he sees him at my side, has never been considered. This solemn fact has dawned upon him with a suddenness and power that startles his whole nature into serious meditation. He is convinced by the ever blazing torch of inherent right that this happy dream of love must end. "She is married," his words are. "I have sinned in entering into her home and destroying the angel of peace and conjugal bliss. The Powers that be restore them to her and let me go away. This world is embellished with beautiful faces whom I may love with pride and wed with honor."

These were very narrow and selfish conjectures set forth by Lois. There was nothing to keep Norman at Rosedale except her; but that was enough,—she was the world to him. In her were centered all the endearing links of life—the fondest hopes, and the limpid springs of pleasure. It was true that he could have led some noble girl to the altar, but he could not have loved her and marriage without love is a hollow aim at happiness. But if he had decided that his presence at Rosedale had become a source of aggra-

vation and displeasure, he would not have imposed himself upon her one day longer.

Let us for a moment consider Lois and Norman's position;—she unmarried and he a husband;— and see what a man may anticipate who throws his whole life into his love and intrusts it to the care of a woman. O, woman!

“Thou art fickle as the sea, thou art wandering as the wind,
And the restless ever mounting flames is not more hard to
bind,”

say Bryant. Another versed in human nature says:

“The man who sets his heart upon a woman
Is a chameleon and doth feed on air;
From air he takes his colour's—holds his life—
Changes with every wind,—grows lean or fat,
Rosy with hope or green with jealousy,
Or pallid with despair—just as the gale
Varies from North to South—from heat to cold!
Oh! Woman! Woman! thou shouldst have few sins
Of thine own to answer for! Thou art the author
Of such a book of follies in man,
That it would need the tears of all the angels
To blot the record out!

It never occurred to Lois Allen that the time would ever come when she would get tired of the burden she had involuntarily taken into her heart; her only trepidation was that Norman would find another face that he admired more than hers and abruptly end their association. That sweet affection which she gave to Norman was the strongest love of her heart. She could never love another man as she loved him. But under adverse circumstances even *this love*, pledged to be so faithful, was destined to relax its influence upon her actions and thereby make him wretched. In doing this she but repeated the history and acted the nature of nine-tenths of her sex. She possessed that callous disposition of a powerful elastic will which was easily moved by a touch of pathos, and would as suddenly bound back to its regular pose of imperious, calculating pride.

Her love, like a paralytic stroke, would come sweeping everything before it and as suddenly relax

its hold regardless of the pain it might cost others. Again it would gradually subside until her heart would contract into its cold limits of hauteur and selfishness. There were times in her life when she most highly regarded the happiness of Norman, times when she would have undergone painful self-immolation for his favor and esteem, and times when her whole prayer was to make him happier. Not that she ever ceased to love him, for she was always interested in him, but the ruling principle of her life was to make her own surroundings pleasant—subverting her love into a secondary consideration. With such a heart she loved Norman; that she loved him truly and earnestly the future will evince.

“Lois,” exclaimed Mr. Allen as he came to a letter with a broken seal, “What does this mean?”

“Really, Mr. Allen, I opened the letter through a mistake, and when I found it was yours I did not read it,” she responded a little annoyed that he would publicly reprimand her.

As Mr. Allen’s eyes followed the closely written words of the mysterious missive his face reddened with anger and then paled to an ashen hue in morbid fear. His sins fell upon him like a leaden weight, stunning the fibrous sense of conscience into the most mortifying confusion.

Iris entered the room wonder-struck at his arrival. He did not observe her until she was at his side, expressing her congratulations upon his safe return. He turned and thanked her with an impatient twitch of his rugged and rather hollow features.

Mortified at the strange manner with which he greeted her, she sat down in speechless surprise.

Norman awakened to a live sense of curiosity, without the remotest conjecture as to the true nature of the trouble, involuntarily asked.

“Something gone wrong, Mr. Allen?”

The addressed raising his eyes in blank perplexity until he reproduced the wasting sound on the tympanum to make sure he had not misunderstood Norman, replied with a languid significance:

"A little crash in business circles only."

"Will your loss be serious?" continued Norman.

"Only a few thousand," he replied, evidently aiming to terminate investigation.

Lois, who had been an interested witness, remembered with distinct clearness the name "Anna Martin," subscribed to the letter he was reading. Why a lady would be notifying him of a business transaction, which appeared to be of so much consequence, was a mystery to her. In spite of a resolution to believe otherwise, there was a strong disposition to question the truth of the statement her husband had made.

Mr. Allen gradually recovered his composure and renewed the conversation with unusual interest and attentiveness.

Soon Iris and Norman withdrew from the library, leaving wife and husband alone. As Norman passed through the wide open door Lois' and his eyes met in a passionate, soul-speaking look. Volumes would not express the comfort that look spoke to each other. The wordless dialect was unobserved by Mr. Allen, and as yet no suspicion of the real state of affairs dawned upon him.

"We will have a delightful view of the sunset," said Iris as she posed her shapely arms to part the heavy curtains which had been brought from Eastern looms.

"The western balcony is your favorite resort—made so in memory of those delightful moments of the past—Humphrey; you remember.—"

"Mr. Wellington, we will not call up the past this evening," she interrupted with a sigh of pain, as she appropriated the unoccupied seat at his side.

Lois, hearing the clear, silvery voice and being impressed with its sad modulation, inclined her head to a position from where she could see them through the open door. She thought she traced the shadow of disappointment in Iris' face as its expressions were intensified by the subduing effect of sunset. Her

interest deepened as she heard her sister's flexible voice repeating:

"Awake wordless song more than words—
A song whose meaning words cannot convey.
Like angels' voices at the death of day
O'er time forever fled, a requiem singing.
Heard of the soul alone, it dies away
In ecstasy of echoes sweetly ringing,
And now the sun is sunken and its light
Pales on the western wave, and on the world.
The halls of heaven that gleamed with red and gold
Dim clouds, like sorrow rise and shut from sight.
While dark, dark descending on the earth, night
Broods o'er the face of nature gray and cold."

Lois felt uneasy; she could see that Norman's face was aglow with interest, as Iris eloquently discoursed upon the beauty and grandeur of the sunset, illustrating by it the last scenes of life.

"But why," she asked herself, "should they not love each other? Iris possesses all the personal charms that I do; she is not married. What cause is there to prevent them loving each other? I might have known they would."

Raymond Humphrey's name broke in upon her meditation. Those passionate brown eyes, full of love's burning fire, could not be forgotten in a moment or treated without deep consideration. If she had revealed her folly, Iris would have been his betrothed now. She knew that her sister could not have resisted his earnest appeals. As it was she would lose Norman's affection as a punishment for her sin. Such was the sophistry and fantasy of a jealous and love-diseased heart.

Although it had only been thirty minutes since Norman had opened the window of his heart that she might read how much he loved her, this was forgotten and she was making herself wretched over nothing, a mere fancy. It is significantly strange, that a woman in love will not even trust her own sister; something so predominantly selfish in her nature that she will not honor the man she loves with the full confidence of her heart, yet she will not neglect the opportunity

to enjoy the boundless confidence of his untiring, unyielding and endless affection.

"Lois," said Mr. Allen as he put his arms around her, "what are you so interested in?"

"I was just listening to Iris quote some poetry which I admire," she answered with an aching fear that Norman would look up and see her in Mr. Allen's arms.

"Lois, darling, I have come home to make you happy. Only tell me I have the encouragement of your unbounded love," he said with impetuous entreaty.

"Yes, you have it all," she whispered in breathless dread, her eyes upon Norman's face.

"Have you been very happy since I have been away?" he asked as his heart convulsed with terror.

"Yes," she answered.

"Lois," he began, "I fear I have begun too late to teach you how to love me. My heart yearns for the undivided love, the profound confidence and the highest admiration of yours. I had to go away from you to learn the state of *my heart*. When I was far away, travel-worn, yearning for the loving tenderness of a wife, my mind would always come back home to my beautiful Lois. Tell me you will henceforth chain me at your side with tender ties of kindness and devotion. I love you firmly, truly, devotedly."

"Yes, I believe it, Mr. Allen, but please don't tell me any more about it this evening. I am not worthy of such love from you," she said impatiently as she endeavored to control herself.

"Very well—as my love pleases," he said caressingly.

They left the library for a stroll in the grounds.

* * * * *

"What do you think of the ghost the servants have seen in the garden?" inquired Iris of Mr. Wellington.

"Well, I have no right to dispute that they have seen something which they think is a real ghost," replied Norman with strong assurance.

"Are you well enough informed in ghostology to know one if you should see it?" she asked pertly.

"I am well enough informed to know there are no real ghosts," he declared as he ran his hand through his hair.

"If there are no real ghosts, and there is some one playing the ghost here, we ought to make some arrangement to find out the duplicity," she said zealously, her eyes dilating with interest.

"I have watched for it two nights with the determination to know more or less——"

"And did you see nothing of it?"

"No; it did not make its appearance," he said with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Then I guess it is a hoax," she smiled, though a disappointed look was in her eyes.

"It is possible," he said, "that there has been some one about on a mysterious errand."

"Will you not continue your watch?" she asked with less animation.

"To-morrow night," he whispered as his mind drifted away from the subject.

"Here come Mr. Allen and Lois," observed Iris with a smile.

"You are having a delightful evening," remarked Mr. Allen as he turned to Norman.

"Very pleasant indeed," he responded as he looked at Lois to see if she had been enjoying herself.

"Rosedale has acted like a charm upon your health. You have shed that forlorn, hopeless look you had when I left," Mr. Allen said as he gave Iris an intimating glance.

If Richard Allen had known the real cause of Norman's happiness he would have dismissed his presence from Rosedale without mercy or warning. His heart would have rankled with that jealousy which meant cold, premeditated murder. He had never loved his wife until now. The foul, cruel heart he was trying to impose upon his wife, in the sacred name of love, was unworthy the respect of any woman. The real merit and virtue of true manhood was lost in the

extreme selfishness of his perverted, abused and desecrated life. How any woman of Lois Allen's refinement, innate culture and inborn pride of character, with her pre-eminent admiration of the beautiful, ever compromised those pure instincts of womanly loveliness in a marriage with a man whose every aim was a fatal mistake, whose entire life was a succession of theft and robberies, is a question that admits of too much latitude for discussion. She possessed those finer intuitions for delineating character which can read the true worth of a face with unfailing success; but a person may have but little confidence, or none, in the character of an individual without having the remotest idea of what his life has been. •

Iris smiled as she understood the implication of Mr. Allen's remark.

Lois blushed and was silent; but in her heart she was glad she had known Norman and was able to make him happy.

"Do not estimate Rosedale too highly for its wholesome air and otherwise medicinal properties, until you have fairly considered how much your congenial family have contributed to my health," said Norman, advisedly.

Iris felt that if he had said "your wife" the statement would have been true.

Lois looked confused and censured Norman in her mind.

Mr. Allen replied good humoredly:

"I suspected as much."

"Sister and I feel very much complimented," said Iris, and her silvery laugh rang out on the still night air with wonderful sweetness.

Lois drew a sigh of weariness. An hour passed and they all willingly sought their separate apartments, but not to rest.

Mr. Allen was fatigued by travel; long, restless nights in strange cities, bitter memories of the past, saddened by constant fear and presentiments of a hopeless future had almost exhausted him; but there was no rest from his toils. He was startled, affrighted

and perplexed as much as he had ever been. "Would she track him down as she had threatened?" he inquired of himself. "God forbid!" he exclaimed in demoniac dread. "I have never known a moment's experience so horrible, so annoying as this. O, Lois! this will wreck our happiness. Why did I not kill her ere I left New Orleans? This is the damnable consequence of not doing work well. It is not too late yet. Let her show her stealthy steps in these grounds—her blood shall pay the penalty and I will yet be a happy man."

He hissed these words in dangerous fury over his thick, coarse lips. If he had listened he could have heard the rustle of skirts as they swept by his door.

Swiftly Lois fled along the dark hall in her slipperless feet; as she stealthily descended the stairs the dark figure of a man appeared in the open door; recognizing him, she quickly threw herself into his arms. He pressed her warmly, tenderly to his bosom as he drew her out on the gallery and whispered:

"Let us go."

"No, darling, not out of the house. I am afraid. See how I tremble," she pleaded, her heart in anxiety between passion and fear.

"Some one will hear us," he insisted.

"We will whisper so low no ears but ours can hear. What did you have to tell me to-night? Tell me quick."

"I have so much—it is all my heart. I want to tell you, it is all yours and,——"

"Oh! it is so sweet to hear you say so. It is music, my soul will never tire of," she interrupted, as she pressed his cheek to hers with a soft, white hand.

"O! Lois, those words fall from your lips as gently as the dews from heaven; honey to the taste is not sweeter than they are to the palate of my soul."

"Surely God made them both. My words are not my own, but heaven-kissed thoughts that none can know but you," she said as she pressed a soft, passionate, lingering kiss to his eager lips.

"Sweet breath of heaven, that fans my cheeks



"WE WILL WHISPER SO LOW NO EARS BUT OURS CAN
HEAR."

to-night. Romeo and Juliet loved not like we. Heaven and earth are silent, and the glaring sun has mellowed into the light from the moon and the beautiful stars to adore our love. My heart can kiss no heart but yours.

‘Never man before
More blest; nor like this kiss hath been another,’

I would rather die than give you up. These cheeks are roses with the dew upon them; these lips a chalice of delicious nectar full and overflowing *for me*. Sweet love, is it not so?” he whispered.

The icy ligaments—the only barrier between self-respect and disgrace—were melting under the rising warmth of sensual fire. She submissively yielded all to the love that was her tyrant, as she answered with passionate energy and softness:

“Yes; this and more. I am all yours, Norman. There is nothing in heaven so sweet as love, then why could there be on earth. I memorized a poem when a child—to-night do I learn its meanings. Listen, my Romeo:

“’Tis sweet to hear
At midnight on the blue and moonlight deep
The song and oar of Adrian’s gondolier,
By distance mellowed o’er the waters sweep.
’Tis sweet to see the evening star appear;
’Tis sweet to listen at the night wind creep
From leaf to leaf; ’tis sweet to view on high
The rainbow, based on ocean, span the sky.

’Tis sweet to hear the watch-dog’s honest bark
Bay deep-mouthed welcome as we draw near home;
’Tis sweet to know there is an eye will mark
Our coming and look brighter when we come;
’Tis sweet to be awakened by the lark,
Or lulled by falling waters; sweet the hum
Of bees, the voice of girls, the song of birds,
A lisp of children, and their earliest words.

But sweeter still than this, than these, than all,
Is first and passionate love—it stands alone.’

“You are my first and only love—it must be sweeter still.”

Until now they were on the gallery with no light

around them except Cynthia's curtained rays as they dimly shone through the clinging vines. At his request they went half way down the stone steps, leaving the door ajar. It was a calm, tranquil night; the air richly laden with delicious fragrance from flowers, vines and trees. The stars brightened and paled in the deep blue firmament, casting their soft shadows around the lone lovers. The moon poured her refulgent gleams down through the stately beeches that stood like two great sentinels on either side the pavement; her silver beams lent solitude a charm which lovers love so well.

"Round them poured a lambent light;
Light that seemed but just to show
Breasts that beat and cheeks that glow."

Lois never looked more queenly or more radiantly beautiful than now, as the brightness of her pearly cheeks shamed the silvery sheen of the moon, and her love-lit eyes paled the stars to a sickly hue. The hand in which she held Norman's,—

"In whose comparison all whites are ink
Writing their own reproach; to whose soft seizure
The cygnet's down is harsh."

She was a vision of rich and transcendent beauty out upon the still bosom of night, closely clasped to her Apollo, with cheek touching his that he might breathe kisses back to hers.

Thus happy in these stolen moments the time passed swiftly, until she, ever fearful of the suspended bolt, started, exclaiming:

"Hush, Norman; I hear a sound."

They both listened in breathless silence.

"It is Mr. Allen coming down stairs, Mr. Wellington. What will I do? If he finds we have been together—O, you must go away. Conceal yourself under the steps. I will go; good-bye," she whispered, as she swiftly, noiselessly re-entered the half-open door.

* * * * *

This is the second time that the opportune inter-

vention of circumstances reversed the tide of consequence; but it is here we see men and women in their most contemptible *role*. The spotless robe of unsullied honor that seals every marriage vow with sanctity, carelessly slips from the ivory shoulders and bosom of nuptial purity to trail in the dust and flesh pools of licentiousness. The respect of the church, the chastity of society and the safeguard to property all depend upon the purity of our homes. *Human* love, ever so lofty and pure, has the taint of *human nature* in it.

CHAPTER XIV.

EDMOND LORAINÉ AND RAYMOND HUMPHREY ON A JOURNEY.

"Muse not that I thus suddenly proceed;
For what I will, I will, and there's an end."

—Shakespeare.

"He is not dead!" exclaimed Raymond Humphrey. "Where can I get some water? It is not necessary that this man should die."

Without waiting a reply from Mr. Lorainé, he stepped quickly to a water bucket which his searching eyes now discovered in a far corner of the room; finding it not empty he returned hastily with a vessel of water. Turning Fred on his back that he might bathe his face, he discovered the wound would necessarily prove fatal. After giving it the best attention available, he unrolled a bundle of rugs that were in the room and prepared a bed, on which he tenderly placed the still breathing man.

Fred Russell was not yet dead, but the wound was a fatal one. Opening his eyes he saw an honest, handsome face bending over him.

"Who are you?" he faintly questioned.

"I am a stranger who would be your benefactor. I found you a few minutes ago lying insensible on the floor, and I am now trying to assist you," replied Raymond in a tone of sympathy.

"And what's become of Uncle Edmond?" he questioned as he tried to turn his head toward the bed.

Mr. Loraine answered:

"I am unharmed, Fred. The dastard scoundrel became so affrighted when he shot you that he forgot me."

"An equestrian passed me at a rapid speed only a short time before I arrived here. I was impressed with the strangeness of his manner and hastened to the house to see if something was not wrong," interposed Raymond with an effort to conciliate the old gentleman.

Fred raised his hands as he said:

"I am going to die. I have a confession to make before I go away. This wound in my head will soon kill me. But tell me who you are, where you live, and if you can write?"

"I am a vagrant now. A lawyer by profession. My name is Raymond Humphrey. I am from Nashville, Tenn., which I left only a short time ago." A sad, cheerless expression came over his face as he thought of what drove him away from home—out into the world—a wretched, miserable man.

Mr. Loraine, who had been studying the stranger's face, addressing Fred, said:

"You may trust him. He will nobly execute any charge you may leave with him."

"I believe it. I cannot defer what I have to say. My time is drawing near. Mr. Humphrey, your appearance is at a most opportune time. You have an honest face and I am going to trust you with a secret that will open up the darkest and most daring crime ever perpetrated. But before I do so, promise me that you will believe what I say, and that you will faithfully investigate what I tell you until justice is satisfied. You are a lawyer. I have the money to amply supply your wants. Carry out my request and a little bag of gold, which you will find in that old leathern trunk, is all yours; take it and spare it not. You see that old man; he has been cruelly, barbarously treated.

Promise me that you will care for him the remainder of his days."

"You may trust me," Raymond said as he thought of life with its sad dreariness.

"Have you any paper upon which you can write my confession?"

"Yes," answered Raymond as he opened a small valise and took from it a few sheets of legal paper, a bottle of ink and a gold pen. "I am ready now," he added as he seated himself on the floor by the side of the suffering, expiring man.

Mr. Loraine raised himself to a sitting posture for the first time since he had been imprisoned at Ancil Ranch. As his mind shed its blindness, his body received new strength. The time had come when mental endurance surpassed all expectation, bursting into the clear sunshine of memory, leaving behind it the debris of a hopeless past. The time had come when the hellish plot, which had been the prolific source of untold cruelty and misery, would burst its cabalistic bonds. It was the supreme moment of his life; he could no longer remain a prisoner in bed; he must learn how he had been wronged; his rage, his bitter invectives against Ike, his hope of hearing the truth from Fred had supplied his energies with new vigor and gave him supernatural strength to lift himself up to hear every word which the repentant man had to say.

It was just sunset when Fred Russell signed his name to the confession in the presence of a number of witnesses.

He called Mr. Loraine:

"Uncle Edmond, I am going away now to meet the great Judge of mankind, who will deal with me justly. I did not meet my fate too soon. I am not worthy to live; can you forgive me? Tell me before I pass over the cold Jordan—my last moments will be pleasanter to know I have your forgiveness."

"Fred," responded the old man, "I do not know in what way you have sinned against me; but, be it what it may, I am more than convinced by your de-

votion to me and your deep repentance that your earthly sufferings and punishment have been complete."

"O! I am dying," groaned the sufferer; "speak quick, or I will go away without it."

"You are forgiven, Fred," he said softly.

A grateful smile passed over Fred's face and he was no more of this world.

Courted death came to him—as it does to every one—in an hour and way in which he had not expected; it found him as well prepared to meet his God as he would ever have been. For twenty long, weary years he had prayed God earnestly to blot out the past. While he never forgot the black, hellish infamy of his own acts, its horrors were softened by the consciousness of having drunk the bitter dregs of self-reproach.

When a good man comes to die he regrets that he did not live a more consistent life; when a wicked, profane man dies it is with regret that he neglected the soul's immortal interest; so, at best, death always brings a sad train of regret, lamentation and sorrow.

Who ever commits an ignominious crime can never flee from it. He may go behind the cross of Christ, but despite all his resolutions and promises, its memorable traces are woven into the conscience with such distinctness that time will never fade it; indeed, he cannot flee from what is a part of himself.

When the last breath of life gave up its hold on the body of Fred Russell, Mr. Humphrey arose from his seat and addressing Mr. Loraine said:

"From this confession I presume your name is Edmond Loraine?"

"Yes, sir; that is my name."

"Very well then; if I carry out the request of the dead, you and I will necessarily be associated in much of your future."

"You have no idea of rescinding your part of the contract," exclaimed Mr. Loraine.

"No, sir; my promise was given extempore, but come what will, I will keep it."

"You have an honest face, and I am willing to trust you."

"Thank you, Mr. Loraine; I appreciate the confidence of gray hairs, and as our acquaintance ripens will endeavor to strengthen your conclusion," replied Raymond with an air of deference.

The next morning a rough wooden coffin was brought to Ancil Ranch; a few hours afterwards it was conveyed to a small grave-yard a mile west, where it was left as the last resting place of Fred Russell. Raymond Humphrey was the only mourner that followed his body to the grave. An army of cow-boys were in attendance at the burial, but the ghastly scene of death was no new thing to them; they met with it at most every turn of life.

Fred Russell's early association was with a tender mother and sister; but his last surroundings on earth were sad and sorrowful. No paternal sympathy to lessen the pain of his last moments; no pitying love to lighten the grief of his heart. Over his grave no tear fell; no flower to brighten with loving thoughts the freshly turned sod. His grave, as his last days, was separated from loved ones.

"Mr. Loraine," said Raymond the next morning after Fred's interment, "do you think you will soon be able for a trip East?"

"I have been in this room for about twenty years, the boys say. Would it not seem impossible that I should ever recuperate?"

"Yet you are able to be on your feet to-day, a thing which has not occurred with you in twenty years," replied Mr. Humphrey earnestly.

"It is true, but I can't comprehend it. My mind is strong and vigorous again. It is more like a miracle than anything I ever knew."

"Let us not try to comprehend; so that the facts are realized ought to be sufficient for our pacification," returned Raymond with a smile that indicated his firmness.

"When do you want to go, Mr. Humphrey?"

"To-morrow, if our arrangements can be com-

pleted. We haven't time to tarry amid these wild scenes."

"Where in the East do you propose going?" asked Mr. Loraine.

"I think it would be best to go immediately to Louisville, Ky., where, in the event your health should fail, desirable attention could be had."

"You are very considerate, Mr. Humphrey, and I feel grateful to you because you promised Fred to take care of me," he said a little disappointed at not fully comprehending the turn affairs were taking.

"Quite true, sir; but you know—that is if you understood the whole of his confession—that it vested me with other important responsibilities; however, I will not desert you. The greatest kindness I can do, is to hunt down your enemy, who so ingeniously and dastardly robbed your life of its rights."

"I remember distinctly now. Fred whispered so low at times that his words were not audible at my distance. I could die in peace now, if I knew that Ike Ancil would ever be made to answer to a guilty verdict in court. That villain who entered my home a charity child, a vagrant youth, proved to be my most insidious enemy. How wicked! how ungrateful he was! Shakespeare puts it:

'Ingratitude, thou marble hearted fiend,
More hideous, when thou showest thee in a child
Than the sea monster.'

"Humphrey, bring him to justice and you shall be amply rewarded. But tell me, have you any knowledge as to where the perfidious scoundrel hides during these long periods of absence? Didn't Fred know anything about it?"

"If he did he failed to tell me, and looking for a man whose features I have never seen and who may have a half dozen assumed names, I must confess furnishes but little hope of success. But let us not become despondent ere our task begins. We have some promising data upon which we may rear our structure of hope with some reliance. If we ever

find him, it will be under some other name; if we ever convict him it will be in consequence of his associations," answered Raymond.

"You speak rather enigmatically to me. Do you think there is any evidence procurable by us which would assure a verdict of 'guilty' were we fortunate enough to find him?"

"Most assuredly, Mr. Loraine. We cannot convict him upon this bare statement; but should we find strong corroborating testimony, we will have an easy going matter of it. And unless we go to the place of Ancil's depredation it will be impossible to ever obtain this character of evidence. The devil was not cunning enough in forty days' trial to conceal his wickedness and treachery from the Savior; nor can any of his followers of the Ancil type outrage justice and society without leaving somewhere a place for attack."

"Mr. Humphrey, I will go with you; I will be strong enough to meet all demands. You inspire me with new strength, new courage and perseverance. If my helplessness becomes an incumbrance, I can rest while you institute a more vigorous search than you could with me. Why do you want to go to Louisville? That was not Ike's former home."

"That is true; but the very first link in the chain that will draw us on his track is at that place."

"What is it, Humphrey? I know you have something tangible upon which to base your assertions, and pray do not keep me in suspense any longer."

"Then you did not hear what Fred said about the two little girls?" questioned Raymond.

"No, I did not understand him. What was it?" gasped the old man.

"Ike Ancil and Fred Russell placed them in the St. Anna's Convent to be educated.—"

"O! I see it all now. The sweet little children are not dead, as they would have me believe. I never did believe it!" exclaimed the old man, joyful tears streaming down his cheeks.

"There cannot be a doubt but what we will learn

something of the mysterious character and life of our man through these girls if we can ever find them. With their immense wealth, which he obtained through this hideous transaction, at his disposal, he has never abandoned them. You may depend upon this, Mr. Loraine. Sin will as surely look after its own consequences as the mother will watch after her children. A man cannot wilfully do another an injury and escape the reprimand of a restless conscience."

"To morrow I leave this old cage, where I have been cooped so long, my heart light and cheerful with the expectation of being reunited with my family. Read me Fred's confession. There may be something in it bearing upon the past which I can understand."

He unfolded the closely written manuscript and read it distinctly. Mr. Loraine listened attentively, his countenance changing from calmness into fiery anger. For the first time he had a thorough conception of how he had been sinned against. His soul in all its pent up wrath gave way to an outburst dispossessing him of the power to speak. When Raymond had completed the reading he sat silent and thoughtful for a minute; soon his anger began to relax its tension, and he said quietly:

"For a while we all certainly do see through a glass darkly; but the time will come when we shall know more. That time is with me now. I know more than I ever did. If I can only live to see those children and clasp them again in my arms, I will die in peace."

"Let us hope, Mr. Loraine, that all things will work good for you, and that whether you ever see your little nieces again, it will be for the best. When we have done all in our power, we have met the requirements of our life and should be satisfied. You have borne more than your share of trouble; but man becomes an object of trouble and appreciation through the inflexible law which governs the world and circumstances. If any one is called upon to bear an unequal proportion of the burdens he should be patient and cheerful. If a human life is ever thoroughly

purged and purified it must be through a process that will eliminate all impurities; self-sacrifice is the only gateway. By natural law man is judged by the affliction and sorrow he has borne."

"You like moral and mental philosophy, I observe. A favorite study of mine in my youth," said Mr. Loraine, his mind momentarily wandering from his troubles.

"Had we not as well begin arranging for our trip?" asked Raymond, feeling it was necessary to devote his energies to marking out his future work.

"We have no baggage—nothing about this cow-ranch we would want to take with us," suggested Mr. Loraine.

"What route do you think would be most practical to the railroad?" asked Raymond for an excuse to state his conclusion upon the matter.

"You forget, Mr. Humphrey, that although I have been in Texas for twenty years, your twenty days' experience has given you a better idea of the geography of the country than I have."

"Allow me," began Raymond, "to decide for us. We can start for Waco to-night, by stage, which is the most direct railroad route."

"That is your decision, is it, Humphrey?" sighed the old gentleman as he thought of the long, bitter past, with its train of sad memories.

"Yes, sir; the boys tell me the stage will pass about ten o'clock. What amount of money have you for our use?"

"There is some gold under the rugs which form my pillow that Fred placed there some time since, saying that if he should die at any time I would not be left penniless. He always said that he had a large sum of money in a little iron box which he kept in an old leathern trunk."

"Yes, he mentioned it to me, as you heard, but I have not yet examined it," replied Raymond.

"Let us not delay it longer."

At this suggestion Raymond proceeded to the treasured trunk. Opening it, he found the desig-

nated box; attached to it was a label, saying it contained so many U. S. bonds, National Bank notes and gold, all amounting to a considerable sum. As he placed the treasure in his valise he said.

"Whatever might have been the man's general character whom I have just buried, he had worthy traits. Think how few men you meet who are as faithful and loyal to their convictions as Fred Russell has proven himself. He was only an instrument in the hands of others. The wicked often shape the destiny and mould the reputation of the mediocre. He was an unfortunate man, but not a mean, cowardly one. By beautiful speech and intrigue he was inflamed into an inordinate desire for money, under which passion he yielded to the will of another. Not long afterwards his folly and crimes became apparent and his heart not being steeped in sin to that extent when it loses the power of self-reproach, he yielded himself to a life of unrequited repentance."

"If in the rank catalogue of crime there is no sin too deep for the grace of God to pardon, then Fred Russell went away from this earth, though his sins were as scarlet, they were made as white as snow. Mr. Loraine, this is a strange affair; it is an inexplicable mystery that infatuates and interests me the more I reflect on it."

At this period a half dozen or more cow-boys lighted from their horses and came into the house. They spoke of the altercation between Ancil and Fred without evincing regret. They liked both, and had no particular preference. Fred was admired for his gentleness and the spirit of justice that characterized all his dealings with man; Ike for his dare devil, reckless habits. Some of them prophesied that Ancil would never return to Texas again; that his business hereafter would detain him in other quarters of the globe. They all were profuse in congratulating Mr. Loraine on his sudden recovery. One, who had long been a resident at Ancil Ranch, expressed his regrets for Fred having been taken to his grave at the particular time when his troubles were just over. He

had watched him in his tender care of the aged invalid and wondered how one could have the patience to sit so constantly in attendance upon the sick.

Mr. Loraine interrupted them, saying :

"I am going away from you to-night."

Some thought he referred to his death ; others decided he had one of his crazy fits.

He continued :

"I do not mean the appointed time of my death will come to-night ; I have thoroughly recovered from my mental aberration. I will leave for other parts of the Union to-night, and you may now look upon the old man as rational."

"How are you going?" they asked, curious to know more of this sudden change.

"Mr. Humphrey accompanies me. We take the stage to-night at ten o'clock," he answered, delighted to have the boys interested in what he was saying.

They expressed themselves as being very sorry to part with him, but they hoped traveling would improve his health and he would be able at some future day to return. They all promised to be with him when the stage arrived to say 'good-bye'—a courtesy not common among cow-boys.

* * * * *

"Mr. Loraine, are you ready?" called Raymond as he heard the rumbling of wheels.

"Quite ready and impatient to be off," he responded, as he saw the huge outlines of an old stage wagon as it moved up the rocky hill under the force of four dashing grays of Spanish taint.

The stage driver seized his pistol in alarm as he saw under the shadow of the trees the figures of men ; but his suspicions were suddenly dispelled when a familiar voice called out :

"No raid to-night, Jack ; just some passengers for Waco !"

"Good-bye, Mr. Loraine ; you too, Humphrey. Luck and best wishes to you both," shouted a dozen or more rough voices as the stage rolled eastward.

CHAPTER XV.

HIS SURPRISE.

"He loured on her with dangerous eye-glance,
Showing his nature in his countenance;
His rolling eyes did never rest in place,
But walked each where for fear of hid mischance,
Holding a lattis still before his face,
Through which he still did peep as forward he did pace."
—Spenser.

Lois met her husband at the foot of the stairs.

"What are you doing here at midnight?" he questioned, looking suspiciously around.

"Have I not the right to demand of you the same?" she responded meditatively.

"I demand an unequivocal reply to my question," he said bitterly.

"Are all demands granted? He who would force obedience to every whim is a tyrant indeed. I rebel against this despotism," she declared firmly.

"What will your puny arm obtain in rebellion against me; I have yet to learn how to tolerate an insubordinate wife. Have you known me so long and now dare disobey my wishes?"

"I am a woman, and you are a man, but I emphatically refuse to submit to your tyranny; I can live independent of you and your sex. Stand aside and let me pass," she commanded.

"Not yet Lois *Allen* unless you walk over my dead body," he said, controlling his feelings.

"Do not call me by that *name* again, or I will make my path from this prison whether it be over your dead or frightened body."

There was something in the desperate demeanor of his wife that quelled the fury of his increasing temper and caused him to reflect, as he said quietly:

"Lois, what means this freak of yours? Is it customary for wives of American men to leave their bed chambers at an hour when honest men sleep, and thus intrude upon the solitude of darkness?"

"Even if I have failed to meet your idea of prudence, I am here. We women sometimes have an *idea* of our own. I fear you do not find in me the *ideal wife* of an *ideal American*."

"You mean that you are here in opposition to my will and you disclaim my right of interference. Who is with you?" he demanded peremptorily.

"Did I say so?"

"No ; b-u-t——"

"Well, let us have no *buts*, adjectives, adjuncts, adverbs, or adjustments, if you please," she interrupted, waving her little hands imperiously. "Since without investigation you choose to criminate me, please determine for yourself why I am here, and if you will, the recreant lover who dares meet your wife while her honest husband sleeps. Taste my lips, see if his honeyed kisses are not fresh there," she concluded, stamping her feet with impatient recklessness.

She attempted to pass him, but he planted himself at the foot of the stairs in defiance.

"I will," she threatened, and turned to make her escape through the door ; anticipating her, he quickly threw himself against it, and locking it, placed the key in his pocket.

"Now you are caged," he said, as he returned to the only place where escape was possible.

"Your prisoner, but not conquered," she hissed.

Several minutes intervened before the silence was broken. She slowly and meditatively walked up and down the hall in front of him with her hands clasped behind her, the magnificent form drawn up with a hauteur that would have awakened the envy of an empress, and her face flushed with the exciting vicissitudes of the night. Through the loosely fastened gown and the fine meshes of the lace bodice, the white, undulating bosom swayed in its superb voluptuousness.

If Richard Allen had pushed his rights she would have rebelled and a tragedy or separation would have followed. It was one of those unfortunate moments in the history of woman when she will not listen to

what her calmer judgment would advise. She looked at her husband.

"What does this mean?" he said fiercely, taking from an inside pocket a dangerous looking knife. "I will know or you shall pay the penalty," he added.

"Do you mean murder, or is this a little scheme of your own to intimidate me?"

"I mean, you shall tell me of to-night's work."

And she read it in his determined face. She at once realized the risk of a physical encounter with him. "Could she not excel him in mental strategy?" she reasoned, and her face grew calm with thoughtfulness. Impulsively she lifted her exquisitely fashioned arm, so as to make the filmy, loose sleeve fall upon the shoulder, but not without a purpose. She let its soft whiteness touch his face, and quickly withdrew it, as she said softly: "Would you take its blood?" He did not speak or relax his hold upon the deadly weapon.

Her mind was made up. This was the time for that shrewd, bold, daring and double duplicity which only a woman can act in cases of emergency. She was a novice, but her woman's intuition did not fail her. She began laying plans with the art of an adventuress. The knowledge of men acquired through years of married life was invaluable to her, and she well knew the man's weakness with whom she had to deal. She determined to pacify him and allay his suspicions. "He must not leave the house under an hour," she decided. Studiously she posed herself, and looked at him with half yielding passion from her large dark eyes. She stood erect and firm, the thin gown clinging closely over the well-moulded hips and the sensual fullness of her faultless limbs. Her attitude thrilled his wanton nature and his jealous anger weakened. She noted the change and felt he would soon be in her power. He was first to break the silence:

"Lois, what has come over you? Before I went away you were an amiable wife."

"Then you should not have gone, since your ab-

sence has caused our estrangement," she interrupted.

"Why is it so?" he asked, trying to catch the drift of her mind, but she was too adroit to commit herself.

"If I have changed, does it not involve a cause, and who would say it is anything else than your absence. I would rather be a maid and sleep within convent walls, than to be a neglected wife," she said indifferently, as she feigned an attempt to pass him.

"Not yet, my love. I would know more of you before we separate. But what do you mean?"

She looked at him curiously from the corner of her languid eye, drawing her under lip between her teeth she bit it and bathed it with her tongue, leaving it as tempting as a luscious peach.

"If you would know more of me I refer you to the stars, my secrets are with them. Selfish and autocratic man to expect his wife to sleep content between icy sheets while he has as many mistresses as nights he is absent."

"Eyes so distant as they
Have no lips for speech,
But from yours read I may
What they fain would teach,"

he quoted.

A mischievous light came in her eyes as she retorted: "What an unique verse. You memorize well; when did you take to poetry, or is it the hour and occasion?"

"I caught the infection from you; your words seem better set to verse than prose. Since fluency comes by practice—only genius by birth—I surmise you have been in the moonlight to compose a love stanza. You never complained of a mistress until now."

"Nor do modest wives wear pantalets on their sleeves to remind husbands of their duty," she replied bitterly. The shameful agony of a guilty conscience poured in upon her heart like melting lead; but there was no contrition for what she had done; the awful and sickening dread only came with the thought of

her secret being discovered. She decided to baffle her husband, and she began to play the game for *victory only*. She had never been an actress, but she was one now, and it meant conquest or death. She threw feeling, blended with pathos and passion, into her work, and she tried to stupefy the sense of pride and obstinacy with rapturous desire. Under the pretense of being warm she almost tore the sleeves from her arms, leaving her corsage bare. "Ha! ha! ha!" she laughed, half amused; "give me a rest," and she reclined gracefully on the sofa, with her nude arms drawn tightly across the back of her head, the raven tresses forming an exquisit foil to the porcelain whiteness of her complexion.

He never took his eyes from her; he saw his wife in a new role.

"Where have you been in your bare feet?" he said kindly, his blood warming under her influence.

"My feet are not bare; you must be blind not to have seen the crimson stockings you taught me to wear," and she raised her white skirts to her knees to undeceive him. He came and stood near her, but she waved him back. "Don't come near me. We must understand each other. So long as this suspicion exists we *must keep apart*. You can imprison me and cut my heart out, but you can't force me to live as your wife. I prefer death to living with the man who believes me unfaithful." She raised herself to a full sitting posture, her white arms and shoulders glistened through the tresses of disheveled hair, and the sighing of her billowy bosom beneath the white crest of lace was perceptible, as she artfully drew the muslin wrapper closely around her until the dimpled knee cap and jeweled garter were in symmetrical outline. His wanton eyes lowered on the faultless hands that lay languidly toying with each other in the undulating lap.

"Lois," he began, "you do not know me; if it were so, you would fear, rather than dare me. If you provoke me I might harm you." "No," he continued, "you are the idol of my heart, and let us not separ-

ate. I have wronged you to-night, and I beg your forgiveness."

She arose and walked away from him, but returned as suddenly.

"Am I forgiven?" he asked, and he held out his arms beseechingly to her.

"Be it as you say," was the simple rejoinder.

"Then kiss me with your old fondness."

She impulsively turned away. "Ah, this cannot be," she thought. "I must act my part, and act it well. He will insist upon his rights; it is cruel; it is even inhuman." She retraced her steps and said firmly and passionately, "I will," and she threw herself into his arms, kissing him with thrilling softness and energy.

Soon they ascended the stairs and entered the second balcony; an hour later she could have been seen retiring to her own private apartments; but not to rest. Her heart was sore with misery and self-reproach. She promised herself to remain loyal to Norman if life was the forfeit; honor, pride—all might go—but she would never, never, give him up. He was happiness, life, all on earth to her—dearer than the vanity of pride, dearer than the love of friends, dearer than the respect of society, dear as the hope of heaven; no fear, no sorrow would ever come between them. As for her husband, she would never disgrace his name, and that was all he or duty could require. She fell upon her knees and prayed God to take her safely through the cares and sin that lay upon her heart.

This jumble of religious impulse and the intrigue of contraband flirtation are inimical to the social instinct, but we see daily living illustrations of this discordant substratum in human nature. If men and women are reared under the wing of the church, the religious germ once planted, they may go far into the byroads of depravity, but when misfortune overtakes them, their hearts will look to God in prayerful entreaty. Every man, whether of Christian or pagan ancestry, has an ideal divinity. Let him hide behind German and French philosophy or the Ingersolism of

the present century, and *this ideal* will follow him to the chamber of solitude, where he will open the windows of his soul and pour out to the Great Infinite a confession of human dependence. Such we believe to be man's private history, whether Christian, pagan or Jew.

* * * * *

Norman Wellington crept from his hiding place to his room, but not to sleep. His mind took on strange ideas of right and wrong. Each solution he gave to the pending troubles was shaped to gratify his own selfishness. Marriage, as it existed, was a miserable failure. The impetuous fire of new born love would never submit to the calculating dictates of reason; duty—word of emptiness, mathematics and icy altitude—could never teach men and women happiness. The central sun of marriage was *love*, all other factors, but distant satellites. He protested against this passion with all the vehemence of his nature; but when he found it was fate and destiny, he gave it up. He was impervious to the designing smiles and plaudits of society. Only Lois Allen met the unqualified expression of his heart, and held him a prisoner in her network of indefinable charms.

* * * * *

"Love is certainly not," he continued, "the same to all men; if so, we are but a race of slaves. There is a placid love that is all grace and suavity; there is a sickly, sentimental force that lasts but a day; there is a sensual, grovelling love that corrupts the soul, and there is a love which elevates because it proceeds from the highest intellectual essence, purifies the soul because it is of heaven's arrangement; it is permanent because it embraces all of hope; it is sweeter than life because it is newer; it is stronger than honor because it is more than honor; it is stronger than pride because it does not respect it."

There was nothing to change the tide of his sweeping adoration. The sin and folly of this shameful proceeding never impressed him, so happy and contented was his mind always resting. His attempt

to love Iris was idle mockery—evinced clearly he loved Lois for something more than external appearance; that love was formulated on other basis and bound by other ligaments than the pearly white of the cheek, or the bright lustre of the eye; that man could love a soul, a disposition and other innate excellencies, as well beneath the wrinkles and faded expressions of age and affliction as under the loveable freshness of youth.

* * * * *

Nothing of moment occurred at Rosedale for several weeks. Lois and her husband remained the same. There was but little demonstration of affection on either side; she was the same, calm, haughty woman of immovable pride. She had no love for him, but she resolved to heed the decree of the inevitable.

Iris never became entirely reconciled to her sister; however, she lost much of her former bitterness and endeavored to be her old self again. Nothing had been heard from Raymond Humphrey since his abrupt and mysterious departure. She watched the daily papers, anxious to learn something of him, but all was against her. His image was as fresh in her heart as it was the last moment she saw him. "She loved him now; she did not hesitate to acknowledge it, and if he never returned to claim her as the object of his heart's love"—then she would stop, as her mind went back to that unfortunate scene in the summer house.

Norman and Lois were thrown together daily; a soul-speaking look, a significant act thrilled their nature. They studied and planned how they could be together; what one could not understand the other would explain. She memorized beautiful, thrilling poems and recited them to him, adding to their music "the music of her voice." Such perfect trust and confiding love made each a part of the other.

"Does she think too much of him?" Mr. Allen would say, but he could never obtain evidence to confirm his fancies. What treachery and perfidy can be

hidden behind the leaves of a book is yet to be written.

The ghost had become a frightful annoyance among the servants. Sambo had quit staying at home during the night. One heard nothing but ghost—ghost—among the whole negro fraternity. Norman had sat up a few nights, but he never saw it any more. Iris was much enthused upon the subject and often watched with the servants. Once she saw it and spoke to it, but it swiftly fled away. This was only one of the many incidents going on at Rosedale.

"Where is Norman to-night?" asked Lois of Iris, thinking no ear but her sister's near.

Before Iris could reply Mr. Allen stepped from his place of concealment and tauntingly interposed:

"You seem to be much interested in Wellington recently."

"Have I not a right to be?" she answered haughtily.

"Perhaps," interposed Iris, "she has a right to be, but not the liberty."

"I like less jeering and sarcasm when I speak to you," he said bitterly.

"Only qualify your addresses with less insinuation and they would have a gentler response," she answered, quite at ease.

"I am sure I do not know what claims Mr. Wellington may have upon you," he answered scoffingly.

"Nor I don't suppose you will ever know," she slowly remarked.

"Hush! both of you," commanded Iris, as she saw Norman coming up the avenue of beeches.

Lois was silent, but her heart was afire with indignation.

Mr. Allen was getting fearfully jealous, and he resolved to give Norman a broad hint to leave Rosedale.

As he and Lois ascended the stairs to their apartment, he said:

"I am going to order Wellington to leave my premises."

"Mr. Allen," she replied, "you will do me a great

favor to keep such things to yourself; that is no concern of mine."

"You act well," he laughed, and his heart filled with bitterness toward the whole world.

"Good night, Mr. Allen," she said, as they came opposite her apartment, and opening the door, she locked herself within.

He stood without in a tumultuous rage. For a moment he did not move; for a moment he resolved to enter the room by force and kill her; but, changing his mood, he walked away muttering a bitter oath between his clenched teeth. Once in his room, he threw off his coat and gave himself up to a most extravagant use of invectives. No man or woman was too good for his abuse. He was gradually undergoing a change from bad to worse, the unexceptional doom of all degenerate and profligate men. The edict went forth in the morning of creation "as man lives, so must he die." Let youth sow poisonous seeds, and old age will harvest misery. Our sins will come home to us when they are not expected.

Assured her husband was in his room, Lois emerged from her private boudoir and went in search of Iris. She tapped gently at her door, but no voice responded. With easy movement she directed her steps down stairs; arriving at the base of the long stairway she saw Norman and Iris through the open vestibule on the veranda. She instantly made her way to them.

"You were unexpected; we thought you had donned your dishabille and were now sleeping," smiled Iris.

"I hope I am not unwelcome," replied Lois, as she took a seat near Norman.

"Well, I must confess I could have gotten along just as well without you. It is not pleasant to have a secret half told," said Iris playfully as she toyed with the costly gem which ornamented her milky neck.

"I can retire rather than intrude myself into the private conference of others," rejoined Lois, her feelings a little stung.

"Mrs. Allen, stay with us; we appreciate your company. I am sure Miss Iris only meant to tease you. We have been looking out for the ghost. The servants say they saw it enter the house about an hour ago; but we were just debating whether their story was a plausible one or not," interposed Norman, turning the tide of conversation into a different channel.

"I am getting serious over this midnight spectre. I shall imitate old Sambo soon if I am not relieved of suspense. There is something here—in these grounds—thrilling, haunting and mysterious, that declines an interview. I have seen it, and I can't be mistaken," emphasized Iris.

"What did you say, Mr. Wellington, about its being in the house?" queried Lois, a tremor of fear in her voice.

"I said the servants told Miss Iris that they saw it come into the house; but you know it may all be imagination on their part," he answered.

"Suppose we institute a search at once," suggested Iris.

"Who of us is brave enough for the work?" added Lois.

"Mr. Wellington is our only hero," indicated Iris, with a laugh.

Lois involuntarily caught Norman's arm and protested that he should not go, that they would all sit up first.

Norman thought either plan useless, as he did not credit the statement of its being in the house.

"Oh, horrors!" exclaimed Lois, "what does it all mean? I will never forget those clear blue eyes, as they peered into my face as if I had been some dreadful person against whom she was seeking revenge. She had a beautiful, charming face, perfect in its symmetry and loveliness. And what puzzles and intimidates me most of all is, that she must have been more sinned against by some one at Rosedale, or why does she dog our steps wherever we move. I repeat, she most assuredly is plotting against some inmate, or supposed inmate, or why should she lurk about the

premises so long. Her face is no ordinary one; there lies beneath its ghastly expression the shadow of a cruel wrong—not a trivial, slight provocation, but across her brow are written the effects of a deep, hideous sin. There has not been an hour since that memorable night on which I first saw her, but that her face in its sad, weird, unearthly solemnity has not been before me. I cannot hide myself from it. That haunting stare fastened itself upon memory with a vice-like grip which will not shake loose.”

“Hush, Lois! You will make us believe there is a fugitive from Tartarus taking refuge at Rosedale,” interrupted Iris, half affrighted.

Norman was silent; his feelings were so cross with his reason that he dared not attempt to give an opinion.

“There is something ill-fated in this to me. I cannot explain; we often know a thing by intuition, though the impression we receive is so evanescent that we are at a loss to express what we know. Iris, you may not always laugh at me for this,” Lois said in a tone that carried with it the force of sincerity.

Iris did not make any response. She thought there might be a little truth in the assertion, but she could not reconcile it with the conjectures of her own mind.

Norman broke the silence by saying:

“If we intend sleeping any to-night it is time we sought our rooms.”

“I must see that the ghost has gone before I can sleep,” said Iris.

“I am with you on that, sister,” admitted Lois.

“Well, let us all go up stairs and discuss the matter over,” advised Norman.

Iris went in advance. As her foot pressed the last step, she was held in speechless awe as her eyes rested on a white figure that stood at the west end of the hall. Norman and Lois came up and stood at her side, their eyes following hers.

“Call Mr. Allen; he can help capture it,” gasped Lois.

"Stand here until I come back," whispered Norman.

"No! no! please do not leave us!" they pleaded.

"I will stand between you and all danger. I want to approach as near as possible without attracting attention, and then capture her."

"Let him go," advised Iris. "You know Mr. Wellington can hold her so that she cannot hurt him."

Norman started; with faces as pale as death they watched him in breathless dread.

"Look! she moves, Iris," breathed Lois.

"He will not catch her," whispered Iris.

"I am so frightened—she sees him. She is standing at Mr. Allen's door."

"Wait, Lois," interrupted Iris. "She is no ghost or spirit from the dead—she is a real woman; there is no danger unless we interfere. Evidently she has been quite wealthy. Mercy, she is gone! Did you see her escape Mr. Wellington?"

"I failed to get near enough to even make an effort to take her. She is as limp and agile as a cat," he said as he returned to Lois and Iris.

"Has she left the house?" asked Iris.

"No; she cannot make her exit from the south end. You and Mrs. Allen go out on the north veranda and watch for her escape through the front way, while I go and try to intercept her as she crosses the lower hall."

"Take precautions that she does not hurt you," whispered Lois as Norman passed her.

Noiselessly he strode down the stairs that led him to the north door, which he found locked; turning, he swiftly proceeded to the south end; pausing at the bottom of the steps which led to the second story in the rear apartments, he looked around him in breathless silence. Seeing no trace of the fleeing figure, he suddenly, deftly ascended the steep flight of steps. Once more upon the second floor, he listened for one dread moment for the rustle of skirts or the fall of a stealthy foot.

"Pshaw! I am on a cold scent," he muttered as

he continued his pursuit along the east wing.

This part of the house was as night. Being well acquainted with every inch of the ground, he made his way to the extreme south-east corner. The moon poured her refulgent rays through the small latticed window that gave a magnificent view of the East. A feeling of dread crept over him as he passed through this uninhabited portion of the building. Again he listened for a light footstep or the quick beat of a frightened heart; again he was disappointed, and again he resumed his search with dauntless courage, determining to find her if she did not make her escape by forsaking Rosedale. Slipping along a narrow hall that led to the central apartments reserved for Rosedale guests, suddenly the sound of approaching steps was heard; he paused to make sure he was not mistaken; darkness deepened into frightful blackness, cold terror swept over him like an electric shock.

A cold, icy hand was placed upon his a moment, but before he could recover his equanimity sufficiently to take hold of her she was gone; so soft, so gentle was her step that no sound was made by her departure. Thinking that she retreated when she became cognizant of his presence, he hastened to the end of the hall, where a dim light flickered, but there was no vestige of a person. Looking down the dimly lighted passage to the west end he saw Lois and Iris emerge from one of the servant's rooms. He went to meet them. They were in a most confused state of terror. Seeing Norman, they advanced to meet him at an unconsciously rapid pace, exclaiming:

"Oh! we have seen her. She was coming toward us, but seeing us, she went another way, like an ethereal something."

"Which way did she go?" questioned Norman, a little puzzled.

"We were so frightened that our reason was thrown into a panic, and we could not tell which way she went," they answered.

"It is strange—very strange," he repeated, a little more dismayed than he was willing to confess.

"You are scared, Mr. Wellington. Your face is deathly white and your eyes—has she hurt you?" exclaimed Lois as she clasped his hand in hers.

"Sister, compose yourself; we will all lose our reason if you don't, and the frightful thing will take us off to the charnel house," persuaded Iris as she noticed with what an effort Norman controlled his feelings.

"I no longer censure Sambo for leaving this haunted place," whispered Lois.

"Is it a corpse that has burst the cerements of death and come forth to make the night more hideous? Mr. Wellington, do such spirits, when they come in the chains of death, ever dye their hands in the blackness of crime, or is their mission to scare women and negroes into a stronger belief in ghosts?" asked Iris more composed as the trio entered the north veranda in search of seats.

"I am as much nonplussed and bewildered over this matter as I ever was about anything in my life. In fact, this is my only experience with a ghost—if it be one, and for convenience we will designate it as one until we know more of its mysterious existence. Don't trouble yourself about disembodied spirits returning to earth in a visible, tangible form; such an instance has never been, and I think I am safe in saying never will be. While there is an inexplicable mystery connected with what we have seen to-night, it will be clearly understood some day, and your present fears and ideas will be exploded as a myth—the finale of all ghosts. Ghosts are nothing more than the phantasies of an ignorant and superstitious mind."

"But, Mr. Wellington," interrupted Iris, "tell us what you think about this veritable phenomenon of to-night. No ingenious arrangement of sentences will convince us that our eyes and brains have been deceived; no classification of different varieties of objects, which the mind may be impressed as having seen under frightful conditions like to-night, will satisfy us that this is but an apparition. We have all

seen something. Like Hamlet's ghost, it comes of doubtful purpose and we question :

“‘What may this mean?

That thou should return from the dead
To make night hideous, and we fools of nature
So horridly to shake our disposition,
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls!’”

“If this be a living person who has not been hearsed in death, how does she go and come, eluding so artfully detection? Does she feed upon air? When day dawns, spiritualize herself?”

“You have heard it said,” responded Norman, “that anybody can ask questions, but it takes a wise man to answer them aright. As I make no profession to the latter, I know you will not expect a full answer. There is no question but this is a real woman clothed in human power, just as we are; however, from her facial expression, I would say she is stimulated under the highest key which she means to sound in a terrible revenge. Those eyes of hers swim above the soul of crushed and outraged humanity. That face, as pallid as death, has been robbed of its color by the ruthless hand of distress. We may all safely come to one conclusion, that whatever may be this woman's mission, she is no visitor from the pale city where slumber the trillions who have lived through the ceaseless ages of time.”

“Where does she conceal herself during the day?” whispered Lois.

“I am inclined to believe she lives in this house,” answered Norman. “There are a number of vacant rooms in the east end, which a human eye does not scan once a year. I had never thought of this until to-night, while I was feeling my way along some of the dark passages. Miss Iris is yawning; suppose we retire and make an effort to sleep. It must not be far from day-dawn.”

“If the ghost returns, then what will we do?” reflected Lois.

“Stay in your room and you will not know anything about it,” advised Norman.

"If we accept Mr. Wellington's opinion of its humanity we will not be in much jeopardy locked in our rooms," said Iris as she led the way into the meagre lighted hall.

Norman paused a moment and Lois twined her shapely arms around his neck, pressed a warm, loving kiss upon his lips, and whispered softly.

"Good-night, my darling. God take care of your precious life for me." And again, before separating, their inside lips met in a long, rapturous, fondling embrace.

Norman repaired to his own department, a happy, hopeful man. For one moment he forgot all else except her; if she would always be that kind and tender with him his happiness would be complete.

Lois and Iris did not trust themselves to further conversation, but immediately retired, trying to believe they were safe from any molestation.

While the trio were closing their eyes in slumber a figure of stately height and proportion arose from its hiding nook (where it had watched with eager eyes the movements of Norman) and walked stealthily out into the wide hall. She paused for a moment under the flickering chandelier; her eyes sought the floor in wistful meditation; her brow contracted as if she had an unpleasant task before her. She raised her jewelled arms between her face and the light as her eyes slowly, but gradually, sought the high, frescoed ceiling; but no word escaped her bloodless lips. She sank gracefully upon her knees, as if paying her regrets in a court of sorrows; turning her eyes to the right, she met the mocking smile of Momus as his large eyes seemed to dilate with satisfaction. Turning her face to the left Nemesis frowned upon her—her pale, drawn lips spitting venom across the room at Momus; her fist was clinched and raised to execute her own defense.

Still the kneeling figure spoke not; she arose and resumed her former attitude under the lamp. She wore a beautiful white satin robe that fell around her in soft folds which lent her the air of a distressed

queen. Her dishevelled hair fell around her snowy neck in bright, burnished ringlets that would have shamed Bernice; her full, classic brow gleamed like marble through the tangled strands of gold that fell over it; the soft, deep blue eyes in their soulless expression were arched by the bronzed glitter of graceful lashes and over-arched by the golden sheen of the matchless brows. Her face was white as death as she placed her small hand in her bosom and drew forth a dagger of finest steel; she held the glistening blade to the light and felt its keen edge with the little hand, wealthy with jewels. Still no sigh escaped her lips. Returning the weapon to her bosom, for a moment she seemed under a convulsion of most intense agony; no pulse fluttered in her wrist, or heart beat in her bosom; a fiend had entered her soul and taken possession.

She walked with cat-like softness until she passed Norman's door. Suddenly she heard a door-bolt turn. Richard Allen stepped out into the hall, a wretched, dissatisfied man. For a moment the two faces met; for a moment all was as silent as the grave; for a moment they stared each other in the face as hungry beast and helpless prey. Suddenly Richard Allen dropped insensible upon the floor; suddenly a keen, piercing shriek filled the house like a demon of terror; suddenly Norman sprang from his couch and opened his door. He was just in time to get a glimpse of the fleeing figure as it gave vent to the most violent outburst of screaming.

CHAPTER XVI.

A NEW RESOLVE.

Trifles, light as air,
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ.

—Shakespeare.

Trust not the treason of those smiling looks,
Until ye have their guileful trains well tried ;
For they are like but unto golden hooks,
That from the foolish fish their baits do hide ;
So flattering smiles weak heart doth guide
Unto her love and tempt to their decay ;
Whom being caught she kills with cruel pride,
And feeds at pleasure on the wretched prey.

—Spenser.

When Lois and Iris opened their doors they saw Norman bending over the prostrate figure of Mr. Allen.

"What has it done? Has it murdered him?" questioned Lois as she came upon the scene, frightened beyond measure.

"He will recover presently ; it is only a shock—a fright," Norman answered calmly as he placed a pillow under Mr. Allen's head.

"What is the matter?" Iris chokingly asked.

"It is only a fright," whispered Norman without betraying any fear.

Iris sank upon her knees at her sister's side, and they both fixed their eyes upon the cadaverous face of the insensible man.

Lois frequently gave herself up to bitter weeping. Norman placed his hand upon her head and said tenderly :

"Control yourself ; this is nothing serious ; she has not harmed him."

"But he has no pulse," she sobbed, with a convulsive shudder.

"Be quiet sister ; he is going to open his eyes ; he is not dead," entreated Iris,

Suddenly, quickly Richard Allen sprang to his feet, exclaiming :

"Where is she?"

"Who is it you want? Here is your wife," said Lois in distressed astonishment, as she endeavored to catch his hand.

"No! no! I see you! that woman—that woman I saw in the hall when I opened my door," he rejoined as he fell into a chair that stood near him.

Several moments elapsed ere his full presence of mind returned; then he could scarcely realize the entire situation. His mind, with lightning swiftness, went back over the past, associating it with the present feeling of despondency and regret. Now, for the first time in his life, there was a relaxation of will power, and the splendid hopes of happiness he had erected upon the various exploits of his own depravity were crumbling at his feet. Murderous courage was about to disband its forces and disclose the treachery of his midnight life. The intrepid heart that had fought so many valorous, dauntless battles against the rigid insignia of honor was about to roll its victories upon the consuming altar of its own cowardice. But so brave a soldier was not destined to relax his energies without a struggle for final victory.

The old jealousy and hatred of all that is fruitful of good boiled in his nature with its spiteful vigor. Looking out upon the varied landscape of life, his eyes downward turned, he failed to see the beautiful emblems of moral worth. He lived beneath the ennobling virtue of honesty and Christian altruism, while his soul groveled in the slum and vice of the meanest, foulest hypocrisy. He defined life by the magnitude of his own successes, regardless of what it cost others. Prejudice and jealousy predominated in his nature with such venomous rancor that his loathing and animosity became almost universal. Money and pleasure had been the talismanic words that had committed the twin abortion upon his life—the prostitution of the conscience and the idolization of its own vanity.

This morning found his heart the miserable wreck of rottenness—his tongue the frothy, cobra substance of deception—his eyes the blurred and smoked mirror of the soul; but he rallied to his support that resolution which had never failed him.

“When resolution hath prepared the will
It wants no helps to further any ill.”

With his mouth closed, an expression of immovable determination about it, he arose from his seat; but thinking his strange conduct might excite some suspicion, he asked, his voice betraying but little concern :

“Is this the ghost the servants have been making such a clamor about?”

Norman bowed his head.

“Well,” he continued, his voice faltering in spite of the precaution he took to prevent it, “I do not much censure old Sambo for hunting other lodgings at night. Why have you all not mentioned this horrible thing to me and I would have hunted it down ere this. It seems but a woman.” As a diabolical idea entered his mind, he added :

“She must have a purpose in coming here. We will do quick work in capturing her. I dare say Wellington will consent to that,” he concluded, lowering his voice to an insinuation as he returned to his room, calling Lois.

Norman and Iris passed the morning together, as they were often forced to do since Mr. Allen’s arrival. They had a great many things in common with each other and would often discuss one subject for a whole morning. Iris had unbounded confidence in Norman’s integrity. She was ever affable and often complimentary to him. Had he been very presuming he would have taken her attention as meaning more than friendship. While at times she could not desist from believing that Lois showed him too much consideration, and that he reciprocated it, she would not allow her mind to dwell on these suspicions. One thing was very clear to her—Mr. Allen was getting

very jealous—and that would ultimately complete their separation. While she deeply regretted this, she thought it might make Lois' home life more pleasant; therefore she did nothing to counteract it.

Soon after breakfast Mr. Allen and Lois went out for an early ramble to inhale the dew-laden fragrance of vines and trees. They had not gone far when Mr. Allen said:

"I am very unhappy now; and, Lois, I cannot keep from censuring you a little for it. I love you so much and you stubbornly persist in annoying me by your immovable indifference. My heart feels more softened towards you this morning than it has for some time. You know our lives must be lived together; there is a certain intimacy and feeling which must exist between man and wife or else domestic happiness is a mockery and *marriage is a failure*. For the last month you have been absolutely unconcerned about me and my affairs; nothing I say or do is worthy of your consideration."

Lois trembled upon his arm like a broken reed; a feeling of deep contrition for what she had done passed over her, and she said:

"I will try to do better from this day hence. Forgive my past obstinacy and accept my promise for the future."

"Then you will be mine—just as you were when we were married?" he asked quickly.

"Just the same," she whispered as her lustrous eyes filled with tears.

Since she knelt over her husband's insensible form, three hours before, she had discussed, with heart-sincerity, her love and duty toward him; but there was Norman's anxious, earnest face meeting her upon every occasion. It was evident that she could not serve two masters aright; therefore she was called to decide for herself whom she would choose, was the practical question, Baal or God? If her present relationship continued with Norman she would jeopardize his life and her *own happiness*; if she gave him up under the divine authority of duty, he would be

liberated from all the danger which attended his presence at Rosedale, and his confidence in the firmness and purity of her character would be consummated. Unquestionably duty was on the side of her husband; Baal was the love side of the question.

"A wise man runneth after the ways of the Lord." Twenty-four hours prior to this time all the logic of a Spenser, the philosophy of a Newton, the theology of a Luther would not have accomplished what a mere trifle was doing now. It is strange what little things change the tide of a human life. Two months ago Lois Allen was reasoning herself into a shameful love; now for the sake of her own happiness—nothing more or less—she resolved to retract all she had said and renounce this forbidden sin.

The philosophy that came with the first gush of love was an artless phantasy of the brain; now the sunshine of real life had melted it into ether and there was but one course left upon which to act. The rights and privileges due him as a party to her love were absorbed in her own selfishness. Instead of going to him with that trusting confidence which had always characterized their association, she severed the bonds between them with all the *sovereignty* of a woman's heartlessness.

Those vows so often spoken, caresses so often given, were but echoes of the past. Norman's heart had been as a plaything in her hands—to will and to do as she pleased with it. So long as love is based upon whims and ideas of propriety, so long will a man's heart be unsafe in the hands of a woman. A woman's affections follow up her own interest, overrides and tyrannizes over everything else.

When, after an hour's ramble, Mr. Allen and Lois returned, Norman and Iris were in the summer house reading the morning papers. Lois bowed stiffly to Norman, drawing herself to a full height as she passed.

Norman knew from the cold, dignified expression of her face that her feelings had undergone a revolution. He watched her as she walked toward the house

holding gracefully to the arm of her husband as if to say to her slighted, forsaken lover, "Look at me; he is mine, take me away from him if you can."

This little escapade had its effect upon him; his heart drooped and sank within him; the paper fell from his hands; he involuntarily arose from his seat to follow her, but recollecting who he was and what might be the consequence, he resumed his seat, a grieved, wretched man.

"The man who sets his heart upon a woman
Is a chameleon and doth feed on air;
From air he takes his colors—holds his life—
Changes with every wind—grows lean or fat,
Rosy with hope, or green with jealousy,
Or pallid with despair."

"Lois," said Mr. Allen as they entered the library with his arm circled around her, "Norman looks as mean as the devil. Don't you suppose his presence has something to do with that ghostly fiend coming here?"

Lois forced a laugh at the unexpected remark, as she drew her husband to a seat opposite the door.

"Mr. Wellington sat up about all night, I think; to which I would attribute his troubled appearance. I don't think he would treat any one very wrong," she said, willing to defend Norman from any unjust accusation.

"Bless your soul! you don't know these shrewd, scholarly fellows; they are the grandest rascals on earth. I would not believe one on oath. You watch now and see if what I tell you isn't true. He has wronged that woman in some way and she is here to have revenge," he presumptuously replied.

While Lois could not gain her consent to believe Norman guilty of these inferred charges, yet she rather congratulated herself upon having renounced his love, because now, if found guilty, he could not expect her assistance or sympathy. Deep below these surface thoughts and resolves she owned he was in deed and truth a true gentleman, and that she loved him.

"He was very kind to us indeed during your absence; but a man's inherent qualities cannot be measured by his affability," she responded, trying to coincide with her husband.

Before Mr. Allen could reply Iris and Mr. Wellington appeared at the door. Norman glanced into the room; his eyes fell upon Lois' face as it rested on the shoulder of her husband. A gleam of half sorrowful triumph came into her eyes as she beheld his pale, dejected face. He could not endure it; excusing himself to Iris he retreated to the summer house, where Lois first promised to be faithful and true; as yet no unkind thought of her passed the door of his heart; he realized there had been a change in her since last night, when she had pressed her lips to his, invoking God's blessing upon him.

* * * * *

"The ghost! the ghost! Oh, the ghost! I can't endure this horrible suspense and fear any longer. If you and Mr. Wellington don't catch that maniac to-night and have her sent to the asylum, I am going to the city," expostulated Lois as she thought of last night's terror.

"What does Wellington say of her?" queried Allen determining he would lose no time in preparing the minds of Rosedale's inmates for receiving his story.

"He seems a little troubled this morning, and we have not mentioned the subject except incidentally," replied Iris, unconscious of the perverted use that he would make of her inadvertant utterances.

"I would be surprised if he did mention it again. Wellington knows more of this mysterious personage than you or I have dared to believe," continued Mr. Allen in that same insinuating tone.

"I don't believe I catch the full meaning of your remarks," explained Iris as a faint idea dawned upon her mind of what he intended to convey.

"I say it is a significant fact to note, that after the excitement of last night, Wellington does not refer to it during a whole morning's conversation imme-

diately following the occurrence of the event. There is some mystery here; but I don't accuse your friend as being one of the mischievous party."

"We have," began Iris, "amply discussed this theme time and again; not longer than last night, while you were asleep, we said everything in connection with it that was possible, and I am sure that he has made more demonstration towards capturing it than any one else."

"With a studied aim not to accomplish his object—rather pretended object"—Allen broke in, with a sneering laugh.

"This is entirely presumptuous with you," emphasized Iris.

"Inferential presumption with a splendid array of facts to make it conclusive," he jeered.

Lois did not open her lips; she felt her husband was uttering a base falsehood, but somehow, through a selfish regard for her own future and a mythical, misconceived idea of duty, she sat by with her lips sealed and heard her best and truest friend traduced—the man who would have sacrificed his life for her, yet she opened not her mouth in his defense.

"Only to a diseased judgment and warped conscience," replied Iris earnestly. "I have been with Mr. Wellington every day since its sudden appearance and I am sure there has been nothing suspicious in his conduct."

"In your opinion, you had better add," taunted Allen.

"There are certain manifestations," resumed Iris, without suffering herself to become much exercised, "that are inherently right by every rule of justice. When it requires analytical powers to distinguish a man's faults I have a very high regard for him, because there are so many men whose facial expression betray their depth of character. Right and wrong are not mere opinions, they are principles which live in the world as virtue and vice. Your opinion or mine does not affect the existence of either; all it can do is to have a corresponding result upon our lives."

"I do not care a cent for your religious philosophy or for your opinion upon ethical science. I simply intended calling your attention to certain facts which point significantly to a certain conclusion. I was aware that your attachment for Wellington would at first cause you to dissent from my warnings; but I think after you deliberate over the matter you will agree with me—that after all this is a Nemesis come to revenge herself upon Wellington for his miscreant deeds."

"Improbable, Mr. Allen," exclaimed Iris. "These are serious charges you are bringing against this man; and, inasmuch as all your suspicions are groundless, they appear maliciously unjust. Prejudice sometimes binds our will and passions against reason and all the higher obligations we owe to each other——"

"Stop!" exclaimed Mr. Allen excitedly; "let me explain. I don't accuse anybody—distinctly understand that. As for that empty song of prejudice, I have heard it all my life; *higher obligation* is a phraseological expression that signifies a sneaking scoundrel."

Richard Allen knew nothing of the secret relationship that existed between his wife and Mr. Wellington; his jealousy was not based upon their seeming fondness for each other, but upon the cold indifference of his wife and the courteous, high-minded conduct of Norman. His hatred was, therefore, no part of any wrong which he conceived Wellington had done him, but it grew out of the unconquerable aversion he had for all men who discussed the virtues and vices of the country with a strong approbation of the one and a strong condemnation of the other. He could not tolerate the presence and influence of men whose ideas were above his. He found fault with nine-tenths of the leading men, and delighted in ventilating his rancor before his wife and others with whom he was associated.

Lois had always known this predominant trait of her husband's and often tried to quell it, but whatever might have been her influence she could do

nothing towards reconstructing his stubborn disposition.

Iris was more than shocked at Mr. Allen's remarks, but she firmly resolved to meet his reflections on the principle that right should always be defended.

"What is the real difference between implying a thing and speaking it?" she asked.

"One is to think and the other is to speak it," he retorted.

"Then you think it but lacks the real manhood to say it," she fearlessly returned.

"This is a free country and I have a perfect right to any private opinion I may wish to encourage," he said, with a hasty cough.

"So long as it does not involve the honor and good name of another," she interposed.

"Ah! curse that law; you have taken everything back to those elementary rules of boyhood. You might discourse to a boy (in whom you were trying to pump clerical lore) of honor, but to a sensible man,—you had as well try to melt a stone by blowing your breath on it," he said as he arose from his seat and walked across the room.

"We often," she replied retaining her equanimity, "find ourselves in harmony with an idea without being able to give a reason for it. Men are not always controlled by circumstances or external environments, but are led into certain heresies by the cultivation of a disposition that antagonizes all that is orthodox. The principles in us all, that would justify our own deeds is very delicate and fibrous in its texture, and is susceptible of the grossest perversion. While you do not openly implicate Mr. Wellington, you would have us look upon him as a very mean man, though he is, in this case, innocent. You have ostensibly taken this position as being in harmony with your feelings and, by the rule of inordinate selfishness, justify yourself. Is this fair, Mr. Allen? I am willing that you dispose of Mr. Wellington's services but tell him so in a courteous manner."

"I thank you for this lecture and your friendly

counsel, but insist that I still have the right to think and do as I please," he replied angrily.

"Most certainly you do; and if I wounded your feelings only try to believe it unintentional," she said apologetically as he hurriedly left the room.

"Iris, you were a little unjust with him. His faults are numerous but I don't think he is the worst man living," chided Lois a tinge of sadness in her tone.

"By no means the worst, I hope," replied Iris. "But this is a very unjust verdict he is trying to bring upon Norman Wellington. In your heart you know he is not guilty of what your husband reflects upon him; in your heart you know he is a gentleman."

"All that is true. I have a very high regard for Mr. Wellington;" her voice faltering she continued; "but it does no good to taunt Mr. Allen about it. You couldn't change him."

"Is it becoming us to have our best friend slandered before our eyes without uttering a word in his behalf? Queer ideas you have of right. Lois, you are my sister and it is of your husband I speak, however the truth is the same whether it applies to you or myself. But why did he faint and fall this morning? Why did his heart turn sick with fear? All those allusions made to Norman's conduct are a mere bagatelle compared to this significant phenomenon. Following this suspicious event why does he devise and plot to assail the character of a man whose past is unquestionable unless it is to exonerate himself from possible contingencies?"

"Let us drop the subject; it is very disagreeable to me," interrupted Lois somewhat distressed.

"Your husband has money, and money is power," continued Iris without noticing the interruption. "Whatever he may assert about Mr. Wellington, his money, by perjury, will establish as true."

"Yes; but you don't mean to say my husband would defile himself by such an act," inquired Lois.

"Lois, I have lost that confidence in your husband I once had;—not for any one particular act

which has come under my observation, but from the general trend of his life. If I had the remotest doubt as to the correctness of my opinions I would leave them unexpressed. I feel that I am justified in taking this privilege——”

“There we differ and I would have thanked you most gratefully to have kept your opinions,” interrupted Lois haughtily.

“What is the trouble about?” catechised Norman on entering the room, with but little idea the question he was propounding expressed so much of the true sentiment of their hearts.

Lois turned away as if she had not observed him with rather a disdainful smile upon her lips. Norman noticed it and another pang entered his soul.

Iris, always ready for every occasion, said:

“Lois was laying down a few principles necessary to be observed to govern a husband successfully.”

“Enumerate them to me,” he requested trying to dispel the gloom that was settling over him.

“Very well, if you will allow me to abbreviate them into a few words.”

“Certainly; you may choose your own words,” he assented.

“They were about this way,” began Iris as she looked at Lois and smiled: 1st. Learn to keep your golden silence; 2nd. If your husband says anything you don’t believe, be mute; 3rd. If he plagiarizes one of your ideas don’t tell him of it; if he says it is one of the richest ideas he ever advanced, don’t contradict him, though you know it is your own creation; 4th. When he talks listen, or rather be silent; 5th. If he proposes to hang your best friend—unjustly I mean—be silent—that is, don’t say anything.”

“Five very simple lessons. If these rules are unexceptionably true, every wife ought to have a happy home; for without an exception every wife prefers to be governed rather than to govern. If Mrs. Allen would but give the public the benefit of her observations every home would be a little monarchy within itself,” he replied, his voice charged with irony.

Lois, seeing Mr. Allen pass through the hall excused herself and followed him. This was another blow to the man whose heart was already bleeding with sorrow, but, resolving to make the best of it, he said to Iris:

"It is strange that nothing ever has been heard from Humphrey."

"Does not his business manager know anything about him?" queried Iris with a sigh of regret.

"Not a thing," was his concise answer, but he followed it with a question that rather startled Iris. "Did you see him that last evening he was here—the time he met your sister in the summer house and, under the impression it was you, made an impetuous avowal of love; taking her refusal for a rejection of his suit, he took her in his arms, kissed her and without giving her time for an explanation, suddenly took his departure, declaring he would never return?"

"No; I did not see him," she said meditatively. "But is that true, that he mistook sister for me?"

"Yes; it is every word true. Mrs. Allen was my informant, and she promised me she would tell you about it."

"I am very sorry, but this is the first of it with me," she said regretfully.

"You look so grieved, I am sorry I told you."

"Don't be! I am so grateful to you," she said as her eyes filled with tears.

"Did you love him?" he asked tenderly, as he thought of his own love.

"Mr. Wellington," she said as she looked up, the tears streaming down her cheeks, "I have always wanted a brother. I admire and esteem you very much; say you will fill a brother's place to me, and I will throw away the title 'Mr.' to your name—call you simply Norman, and will be your sister indeed."

He bowed his head, almost overcome with emotion. She continued: "Don't think me weak, Norman, but I loved Raymond Humphrey a thousand times more than words can express."

"He must have returned it, poor fellow!"

Further conversation was hindered by the reappearance of Mr. Allen and Lois. Iris, afraid to trust her feelings in the presence of any one, she withdrew. Mr. Allen retired to the smoking-room, leaving Lois and Norman once more alone together. She sat cold, proud and imperious; he sad and hopeless. A few moments passed in silence, then he said softly:

"What have I done to merit your displeasure?"

"Nothing," she said indifferently.

"What does it all mean? You loved me so tenderly last night."

"It means this now," she said sorrowfully, unshed tears filling the liquid depths of her lovely eyes. "I mean to discontinue our relationship and at all hazards to be a better woman. I have lived with this sin upon me as long as I can bear it. Let us never again think of the past or in any way refer to it. I say it *must* be so. I am going to keep this resolve as inviolate as the law of the Medes and Persians. If this affair continues longer it will ruin and utterly wreck every hope of this life. As for your love, I will just call it devotion; it has been very sweet and tender; for that I will remember you and will never—no, never—forget what has passed between us."

"Lois," he whispered softly, a look of despair in his face, "I still love you. Please don't treat me so cruelly as this. I have so much I want to say. Meet me at the fountain to-night. For God's sake don't refuse me this time."

"Yes," I will meet you to-night, but this must be the last," she answered as she heard Mr. Allen's approaching footsteps.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT THE FOUNTAIN.

Weep not that the world changes—did it keep
A stable, changeless course, 'twere cause to weep.

—Bryant.

"Lois, are you going to thrust aside and smother every feeling for me, that your love may resolve itself

into bitterness? You say you will just call my love devotion, and that we will just be friends and forget the past. Lois, if I could only forget, then I would make you happy, but my love cannot be murdered. I will not—I cannot insist upon your changing your resolves; there is but one death to which the human family is subject and I can but fall a victim to that death—its pain will but ease my aching breast. I have always said if our love was ever shattered it would be by your hand. Darling, why don't you pity me?"

Norman bowed himself at her feet, his heart full of misery and wretchedness in the thought of losing the love and respect of the only woman he ever truly loved.

Lois looked down in stifled pity at the heart-broken man kneeling at her feet—the man to whom she had spoken sweet words—the man she had loved in some way. Her voice tremulous, but cold, she said:

"Mr. Wellington, I have no patience with such weakness; under some circumstances it would become a woman to weep for a lost love, but for man, the stronger, to permit affairs of this nature to unman him is simply intolerable with me."

"Lois, how can you reproach me so cruelly and coldly, so devoid of sympathy? Was it not you that taught me to love? Did you not teach me the lesson I know so well? Had it not been for you I should have always been indifferent to woman. Oh! to die and take my sins with me, thus sparing you and my friends the self-reproach of ever having known and encouraged the acquaintanceship of one so totally depraved in every faculty of mind and soul."

Lois, calm and impassionate, untouched and heartless, interrupting said:

"Say no more; anything you can say or do will not ever scathe my feelings with penitence; I have rules to govern my heart which I mean to keep inviolate. Never show to me by act or word that you even remember the past."

She turned her white face to the west ; the sun had sunk beneath the horizon and no trace remained but a faded crimson light. Something in the stillness around and the soft twilight drew her imperious eyes back to the bowed figure at her feet. She said in her heart : "It is almost intolerable to see a strong man weep. The grief of a despairing woman may be a sad and sorrowful sight ; her tears and lamentations may be heartrending and distressing, but the sight of a man humbled down by irresistible sorrow, breaking forth into wild sobs that seem to convulse his strong nature with unlimited agony that few care to witness, and when seen as I now see it, is seldom forgotten."

She stood erect and stiff, cold as ice and motionless as marble.

"Mr. Wellington," she calmly said, "do not give yourself up to grief ; though I should confess the most profound love for you, what could it avail? Our lives are restricted by surrounding circumstances. We must part to-night forever as regards our past ; an eternal farewell must be spoken."

A long, shivering sigh broke from Norman's lips as he arose and occupied a seat near her.

"Lois," he whispered, "do not leave me ; remember you said it was the last time."

"I will obey you this time ; but I pray you not to speak again of love, seeing that you can do no more to comfort me and secure happiness than to reiterate empty assurances of a meaningless and purposeless devotion. My dream is fled and my happiness destroyed, all that I have treasured in my heart is shattered to irreparable fragments. You are the only man I ever loved, and now you are at my side, cold with despair and hopeless as the grave. I look at you, but you are not the same ; you no longer have any part in my life. If you have suffered for me you have not suffered alone ; it has cost me as much as you. Is there anything on earth so terrible as the burial of a dead past? It is with unutterable woe that I speak these words, but they do mean and shall mean something."

Norman raised the white hand which lay passive in his to his lips.

"Darling Lois, my beautiful queen, you have forbidden me to refer to the past or to speak of love, but you must bear with me now,—this is the darkest hour of my life—it is the one in which all the bitter regret—the double despair and hopelessness of a disappointed life are buried. You must remember how much I have loved and adored, and then think how great, how terrible, how heart-tearing must be my doom? You know my heart next to God. The brother, in whose kind presence you whiled away your childhood days, did not tell you more of his heart than I, nor did you know him better. But now what do I hear? The same sweet voice that taught me to love, is pleading with me to forget, to smother, crush, thrust away the vital principle of my life. Oh! heavens! do you know what you ask; it is life. You had as well with these soft fingers unlock the fountain of my heart and give its blood to thirsty earth. When one individual has won the entire heart there is nothing left for the world; so with me now. I have given all I had to you in such a way that no power could deed it back to me. But at last I am robbed, my faults are made known; I am no longer the same."

Lois heard him with patience. When he ceased speaking she did not attempt to reply; she felt it almost killed her to tear him out of her heart, but she would live and try to be happy in spite of fate. The dear face we have learned to love, the eyes we delight to gaze into, the numerous arts of form and manner which have made our idol a joy and delight to us, are all glorified and deified by the depth of our own love and by the extravagance of our own imaginations. For so long our deity seems to have no fault; then, all at once our eyes are opened and we see him as he is—a creature much as others; selfish perhaps, or cold and cruel, forgetting that which he should have remembered, and regardless of feelings which he was bound to cherish; and then in this altered relation we see before us only the empty shell of what we once

thought to be so perfect—and love becomes bitterness forever.

Thus it was with Lois. Her love of six months since was gone—vanished into thin air. Strange to say and strange to think, but this Norman Wellington who was present in the flesh, bore indeed the outward similitude of the man whom she had loved, but was distinctly different from the man who had reigned in her heart. She knew after to-night she must begin a new life, bereft of all she had fondly dreamt would make up for her joyless past. There was nothing to be gained by seeing him again; no object in a repetition of this miserable scene of woe and regret.

"After to-night," she said to him, "I will never willingly see you again."

"Surely, Lois, we can be friends. Not long since you wished we could be friends as we were when we first knew each other. Surely you cannot mean we must not see each other again. I did not think it possible for my own Lois to turn from me in bitterness."

"Friends," she replied bitterly, "I might have intimated something of the kind, but how can we be friends? How can there be any friendship between us? As long as our lives last we could never meet indifferently. Friendship between us! Friendship is a sweet and peaceful thing born of mutual esteem and confidence, and full of mutual consolation. What is there in the love that has raged so passionately between you and me to suggest so calm and impassioned a climax as friendship? No, let us part and pray that time may cure the wounds which we have inflicted upon each other; the wounds made are too deep to allow friendship between us.

'Friendship is love purged from all its dross.'

Time may bring to us relief and indifference, but resolves simply cannot do it."

"Lois, to each man and woman God has created one other soul that can give content—so that no other person on earth can sweeten their lives but that one only, and when a man who loves *one* by some sad

mistake marries another, then he cannot find happiness. Is my sin so great that I must always suffer in this manner? What have I done more than other men that I can share none of the blessings of life? Why should nature's God have been so cruel to one so frail and helpless as myself? You have told me so often that you loved me, that I filled your heart's ideal of a man. Will you not repeat those words again? This is our last time together on earth; we part to-night forever; then let me drink from your heart, in words from your own sweet lips, the story that is written there. My own, darling Lois, do not deny me now."

Norman waited a reply but none came. Lois sat by him, her face

'Pale as death, cold as marble, star sweet on a gloom profound.'

No tear dimmed the dark, expressive eye. The grief and misery that surged in her aching breast lay incarcerated beyond the convulsive throbs where tears flow from a bruised heart. A wild look was in her eyes—a look of dark, hopeless, deadening despair. She had stood brave, undaunted, facing and combating what seemed to her a cruel, heartless fate, but she felt no longer equal to the severe ordeal. What depths of misery, what depths of utter wretchedness, what depths of self-reproach lay chambered against the blood-stained walls of her heart's sensibility, remains to be told at the bar where all things will be made plain.

"I am so miserable," she thought. Then raising her face to Norman's she cried:

"My heart is broken! I am dying! Yes, I am dead to my old self; I am dead to my friends and dead to my only love. When I was a child I was always so happy. Until I knew you I never felt the bonds of sin and shame—I never felt the pang of utter woe. Oh! think me not cruel if I say you have filled my life with the darkest shadow that ever cast its gloom over human pathway. Think me not cruel if I tell you that I can never love the man again who has

brought into my life so many trials, so many temptations and such bitter self-contempt. Think me not cruel if I tell you 'good-bye' as I would the humblest servant of my house."

She then drew her hand from his as if aroused to the consciousness of some impending danger.

With a wild look of anguish in his face, he exclaimed:

"Oh Lois! are you not content to blast my future life with your heartless decree? Stay with me."

"No, never again. To-night I renew those vows once spoken so sacredly. Now I ask you in the name of what you once called '*love*' to never think of me again."

"I have loved so madly and this is the end," reflected Norman. Leaving his seat he followed her to the one she had taken, and bowed at her side. A strange, wearied, uncertain light flamed from his countenance for a moment, then his pale cheeks grew more deathly, while his eyes sought her face in search of some vestige of love and pity, but no trace of the past could be seen upon her bloodless, pallid face. She had done as she said—divested her heart of everything akin to love, and for one moment felt her bosom surge with hatred for him. She had suffered for their love, but it was appeased by a cheerful disposition, hence her distress was trivial and flitting as compared to his; as his love was soul, heart embracing as compared to her's.

Love is to often attended with hours of heart-burning—hours, days and nights of restlessness, sadness and sighs; hence the pale cheek, hollow eyes and countenance indicative of melancholy and tears, is ever the accompaniment of nearly all deep attachments. Still it is one in which a few moments of bliss blot out all the hours of distress, and one to which the parties will look back as to a sacred epoch in their lives. So it was with Norman Wellington. He loved Lois Allen with all the depth and power of his strong, passionate nature. He gave to her the one love of his heart. Norman's love did not mean Lois Allen's love.

It was not easily extinguished; his heart was not a throne, changing sovereigns with every new acquaintance. His passion was that of mature age when the moral feelings, the reason and judgment mould its growth and enrich its tendrils, until they take deep root in every fibre of the heart.

"You will not leave me now," he entreated.

"Yes; I must go," was the cold, brief response.

"Lois, I have only a few more words to say. Will you hear them?"

She looked down into his sad, pleading face, and answered:

"Yes, Mr. Wellington, I will hear what you have to say. Time will soon cure you of this feeling."

He looked straight into her face and asked, his heart choked with pain:

"Have I taught you to doubt?"

"No; you have not. You love me now, but I am sure absence with time's healing draught will soon work a cure."

"Lois," he exclaimed, "you know so little of me—to think that I will ever change. The love I gave you was my life." Continuing more calmly, he said: "I desire so much to tell you of myself before we part. This is the last interview with the only person who can make life even bearable. As you fade from my sight all is blank and hopeless. The future promises no solace from her treasured lap for my disconsolate heart. You do not like to hear me speak of self—my poor, worthless self; but listen while I tell you of my cousin who bore your name and features. On the banks of the Jackson River, in Northwest Virginia, nestling among clustering trees and grape-bearing vines, is a small stone building erected the year following the surrender of the British at Yorktown. This was the home of my uncle, the foster-father of Lois Earl and myself. We three lived there alone with the old family servants. Lois was the daughter of my mother's cousin, having been left an orphan at eight years of age she came to my uncle's for a home. Notwithstanding our relationship as cousins, we called

each other brother and sister. I was very fond of her and she returned my affection. She was just like you, Lois. Her eyes, her hair, long and black like yours, and then she had your soft, sweet expression.

"Just such a calm, moonlight night as this I saw her last. When supper was over we were led by uncle to the rear veranda, where we remained until the soft gleams of twilight merged into night. As the moon rose in her beauty, little Cousin Lois took my hand in hers and said, 'Brother, let us go to my rose garden. I love flowers more when they are freshly laden with dew.' We promenaded the pebble walks until weary, then sought rest on a rustic seat in the center of the garden. Lois looked across to the east where the moon shone above the hilltops, and said in her childish way :

"Fair hangs the moon and soft the Zephyrs blow,
Proudly riding over the azure realm."

"She was quite a precocious child, owing it to the careful training of my uncle. A moment she gazed on the moon, then turning playfully to me she said, 'Brother, those lines were from Gray. Does not the stillness around and the soft evening atmosphere almost inspire you to poetical vision? Though I have never read much to give elasticity to my expressions, yet I feel and meditate upon the different phases of life with as much spirit and enthusiasm as those whose minds have been polished and trained under the more rigid and exacting systems of education. Brother, do not laugh at me, but something tells me this is a cruel, bitter world—that we cannot always be happy as now.'

"Her eyes filled with tears, her sweet, childish voice, saddened with an unnatural despair too deep for her young heart to bear, I drew her to me and pressed her head to my shoulder. She looked straight up from beneath her jetty, silken lashes into my face. I shall never forget the awful anguish written upon her perfect features; the sad, despairing look that was in her eyes. I never thought to take her in the house. Just then I was excited beyond reason. 'Oh, my darling sister, what is the matter?' I exclaimed. She caught my

face between her soft, little hands, and kissed me. Those sweet, childish lip-prints are upon my cheek now. From that dark period of my life until we met, no woman's face ever moved the depths of my passionate soul, and it is so strange that my little sister and you are so much alike. If she were not dead I would say you were the same.

"My own darling love, believe me when I say that little Lois, though only a child, as she neared the shore of the other world, became aware of some impending danger hanging over us. Whether it was God who opened the dark abyss and gave to Lois this strong premonition of the cruel hour in which fate would separate us, I cannot answer, but as you listen to this secret history the sudden adumbration of Lois Earle's, the fearful and startling presentiments that gave to her mind the power to look through the dark window of futurity at the foul deed that was to forever end the earthly happiness of two young hearts—you may determine for yourself.

"'Brother,' she answered, 'until now I have been quite happy with you and uncle. Oh! to God could we always be so. I am sure we could if we only could be together; but dearest, true little brother, we must soon part. The time is not far distant when something cruel and irresistible will come between us.' 'Sister,' I said, 'let us not make our lives unhappy by gloomy forebodings.' She placed her little hand over my mouth as she continued: 'Do not interrupt me until I have finished. I have so much to say to you before we go in, for I feel after to-night we will never meet again as now. Do you know, dear brother, I sometimes doubt our relationship to each other, although our good uncle tells us our mothers were cousins. Something in your presence, in your bright face, speaks to my listening soul that the tie of blood does not unite us in the bond of kinship. Yet I wish you were my own brother. I remember a brother, kind and dear, away off somewhere before I came to this place, and would like him to know you.' 'Lois,' I said in astonishment, 'what is all this you are telling

me? Why have you not spoken of this before? I thought we gave each other our fullest confidence; I did not think my dear little sister ever had a thought kept from me.'

"Norman, do not blame your little sister to-night; if she has ever concealed anything from you it has been for your happiness and contentment. But be patient and do not laugh at me. Something tells me we must part soon—it may be in death. I cannot tell, only I know a great terror is going to befall us, and I cannot bear to give you up even if there is no kindred ties between us save that of foster sister and brother. I do not want you ever to love another as you love me.' Her face was sad and earnest. I see those eyes looking up into my face now. Look at me, Lois; let me see if your eyes are the same when there is no light but the moon."

Lois turned her pale face toward him; she unclosed her dreamy eyes; never was despair and human wretchedness written more plainly upon the face of any one. Could Norman have looked into her heart and seen the aching burden that lay sorely there; could he have fathomed the cause of the hopeless, death-like expression on her face, he would have left his story untold. Continuing, he said:

"I smiled at her eager earnestness; it seemed to wound her poor little heart, and she looked so sorrowfully at me that I repented of having desecrated the solemnity of the occasion with even a smile. I thought her the sweetest child on earth as she looked searchingly into my face and told me her wishes. 'Oh, Norman, let us talk of our future to-night,' she continued. 'I do not want to be separated from you and yet I know such is to be my fate. As yet our hearts are too young to understand the mysterious impulses that brighten and fill human life with yet unborn joys, but I do not think you and I would ever love any one but each other.'

"For a moment I did not reply. 'Lois,' I began, 'how long have you been thinking about this. I have never looked forward to the time when we should

separate ; we are too young to borrow future troubles. Come, let us go and join uncle, he is through with his pipe by this time and is waiting for us.' She arose from my side and stood by me. For one moment she seemed to communicate with the unseen world, then she grew a little more agitated and again all color fled from her cheeks. She threw her arms around my neck and kissed me passionately, murmuring: 'My dear brother, I fear to go away from the garden to-night. What is that?' she exclaimed and fell as dead in my arms.

"It was a gun-shot followed by my uncle's voice crying, 'I am killed.' O! Lois, come from your spirit home and help me tell my story. This is the first time I have ever told what I know of the sad occurrence of that night."

If Norman and Lois had listened they could have heard a soft voice answer, "Yes, I am here," but the sweet voice was borne away by the soft zephyrs to lose its sound where no ear could hear. Unconscious of the dark figure standing in the shadow of some shrubbery, Norman continued:

"I called to Lois, but no answer came ; she lay dead in my arms. The moon had rolled in silence along her pathless orbit until she had risen above the tree-tops and now shed her brightest light upon my poor sister's face ; wan and still was every feature, calm and ghastly the last expression it bore. I laid her down upon the seat and hastened to the house to tell my uncle. But, oh ! what a sad sight met me there. I left Lois dead in the rose-garden and now found my uncle prostrate, bleeding, dead to earth upon the spot where we left him. Who perpetrated the foul deed and for what cause I have never learned. After calling aloud for help I returned to where I had left Lois, but she was not there. Too great and painful was my disappointment. I clasped my hands and fell upon my knees weeping ; heart-broken and blinded by excitement I started to return to the house, when I saw a group of men, two of whom bore Lois away ; fear seized me, and I sank helpless to the ground,

where I remained until the next day.

"I remember nothing more of her. When I recovered from my fright and excitement a stranger was standing over me. I arose and looked around; half-conscious, I only saw the smoked and naked walls of our little home; it had been burned. 'Where is Uncle and Lois?' I questioned. Then I remembered the sad scenes of the night, and to-day my thoughts are as confused concerning that night as then. I explained to the stranger who was gazing at me in mute astonishment the best I could of what occurred the preceding night, after which he took me by the hand and led me to his home, only a few miles up the river in the dense forest; here I lived and was treated with parental kindness, until I could no longer endure the scenes of my childhood; so I went West to forget the past. Some effort was made to bring the murderer and incendiary to punishment, but no clue to the true marauders could ever be found.

To this day the destruction of our home and the tragic and sudden ending of two lives is wrapped in a deep mystery. Two miles west of the old home are two graves now covered with grass and flowers, which were first seen a few mornings after that horrible night. I used to go to them often and pray and weep, for every one said beneath their clayey mound slept the bodies of my dearest ones. My life and home in this country you know. Shall I leave you now forever?" He looked straight into her pale face, his dark eyes illumed by the deep, undying passion of his soul, as he anxiously waited for her answer.

Lois sat motionless; had death laid his chilly fingers upon her she could not have been paler or more speechless. There was life, but no motion; there was an aching, bleeding heart, but no power to feel its bitter pangs. What was passing through Lois Allen's mind will never reach the ears of any mortal. The deep, bitter, stinging, lacerating regret and repentance that welled up in her heart for the one awful, terrible, irremediable mistake of her life belongs to the secret realms of her own sorrowful soul.

What sad memories and new throes awakened by the repetition of what was written indelibly upon her mind at an early age—the saddest and most cruel hour—was too self-affecting to unlock the channels of speech. What she now realized was the greatest surprise of her life.

If from the silent city of the dead its first inhabitant had arisen and stood before her in mortal garb, greater surprise could not have stilled her throbbing bosom. Some moments passed ere she had power to change her position. What an awful silence those few moments were to these unhappy ones is not “given man to know.” For one moment she pressed her shapely white hand to her troubled bosom; for one moment she stared about her; for one moment the dim, erroneous past—the sad, miserable present—the dark, mystic future were before her. Then she arose from her seat, stood closely by Norman and said calmly:

“Norman, no; you shall never leave me. If possible I will see you again to-morrow night. I will be rested and have regained my usual strength by then. Of course this will alter all my predelictions about our future; woman’s will, you know, fluctuates like prices at the stock exchange. Please don’t condemn me for the parting caress,” she said lightly, as she stooped and kissed the well-loved lips and then walked away in the direction of the house. She had pursued the little path but a few yards when a voice sweet and soft—a voice she recognized as that of her sister—called: “Lois, come and go with me!” Frightened, she turned her face in the direction of the call and saw Iris coming toward her. With pallid lips and husky voice she questioned:

“Have you heard and seen all?”

“Yes, darling sister, but I do not blame you,” was the kind response.

“O, Iris! How could you?” she exclaimed, as she knelt in wild despair at her feet.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DISCOVERY.

"Oh ! nothing now can please me ;
Darkness and solitude, and sighs and tears.
And all the irreparable train of grief,
Attend my steps forever."

Soon after Lois left Norman he fell into a deep meditation. The moon threw her silvery beams around him in exuberant refulgence ; the soft zephyrs chanted their anthems among the trees and flowers, while all nature reposed in lovely solitude. The wretched, desolate man was living in the past. While his mind was yet young and flexible with the first dawn of memory, around him shimmered the glittering crescent of innocent childhood, when love was the dream gate of happiness and trust the pearly hinges on which it turned. There were beauty and real pleasure in the distant memories that took him back to the golden days when deception and misery formed no part of his life. Why had this beautiful link been missing so long to return to-night in its primitive freshness ?

Now the mystery in part was solved. The face of Lois Earle Allen furnished the facinating medium to the rusty archives of memory, and burnished them to brightness. Her face first awakened the longing to dispel the vaporous cloud which had settled upon the past and drop the lantern of memory into her sable cells. That singular, mystical association of Lois Allen with the past was explained.

After all it was not so enigmatical that he should love another man's wife, since it was but the continuation of earliest and fondest attachment. It did not enter his mind that the little sister and Mrs. Allen might be the same person ; he only thought it was a strange coincidence. If Lois would love him as his little sister did he would yet be happy. "Lois !" what love—what music—what sublimity in that name to him !

But the time had come when he had lost confidence in the promises of woman's love; his shattered hopes had been overtaken by the funeral dirge of despair; his heart repeated:

"Hopes—what are they? Beads of morning
Strung on slender blades of grass,
Or a spider's web adorning
In a strait and treacherous pass."

Irreparable fate that had in one hour blasted the vitality of hope and stranded the bark of life upon the rocks of despair. Piteous, forlorn man, whose heart breathed with Dryden:

"My soul lies hid in the shades of grief,
Whence, like the bird of night, with half shut eyes
She peeps and sickens at the sight of day."

When a man loves a woman so much that he forgets all else in the world but her, his life and happiness are vibrating upon brittle threads, and a day, in the obscure future, is not distant, when Atropos will sunder them. Men have prayed for the grave to hide them from their sorrow and disappointment in consequence of woman's fickle ways. An unkind word or act committed between those who have loved has no other meaning than treachery. The human heart—the harp that breathes in softest notes, the delicious strains of harmonious love—is the most delicate and sensitive organ in the entire system of man's susceptible nature; so when the velvet touch of woman's hand is felt no more upon the fibrous cords set to congenial love, there is a palling, a gloomy silence; no other woman can enter the deserted sanctuary and reproduce what has been wasted upon the arid soil of another's heartlessness:

"Oh, woman, woman! thou shouldst have few sins
Of thine own to answer for! Thou art the author
Of such a book of follies in man,
That it would need the tears of all the angels
To blot the record out."

This was a dark, disconsolate hour to Norman Wellington in which his heart struggled for mastery over its own conviction. The time was near he

thought when he would be forced to leave Rosedale. By to-morrow he felt Lois would be sorry that she had reconsidered her first decision and promise to meet him again—then all would be lost. He thought of Iris, wishing it were prudent for him to take his troubles to her for sympathy, and advice; he felt that wherever he might go he could rely upon her friendship.

Suddenly he was aroused from his sorrowful meditation by a light footstep; turning his eyes towards the issuing sound, he saw the stately figure with the gleaming, pallid face, which he had seen the night before. For a moment he was seized with terror; but thinking how little he cared for life or death, he as suddenly recovered self-possession. She came very near him as she sang—lowly, in harmony with the night—full of solitude—and the ever murmuring fountain:

“O, take me in, a fellow mourner with thee;
I'll number groan for groan, and tear for tear,
And when the fountains of thy eyes are dry,
Mine shall supply the stream and weep for both.”

When the soft trills of her musical voice were borne away on the whispering winds quietude reigned for a moment, and her sad voice echoed across the heart of her listener with sympathetic expression. There was a sad tone in the mournful refrain as it died away on the balmy breeze that awoke in his soul a pathetic kinship.

“May I inquire your name?” she said slowly as she sat down on the grass at his feet, a living shadow of woman's despair.

“Since you are no spirit from the other world, as some of us supposed, and, if your memory serves you well, you know my name,” he answered as he fastened his dark eyes on the pale blue of hers, while the moon showered her refulgent beams upon the unveiled head. She hesitated a moment and then whispered:

“She called you ‘Mr. Wellington,’ I believe.”

He bowed his head and added:

"I searched for you last night, but you eluded me quite artfully. I wanted to capture you to learn your business at Rosedale and who you were. Will you not now tell me?"

"Yes," she began softly; "that is why I came to you to-night. But before I do, I want to make some inquiries of you. I hold in my bosom a secret of yours dearer than life to you; but I believe you are a man of strong character, as is evidenced by my coming to you to-night. I want you to believe that integrity will keep me from divulging your secret. Fate betrayed it into my possession, and whatever you may think of me, I certainly have too much of my former self left in me to meddle where I have no concern."

Norman bowed his head as if to thank her, and she continued:

"Before I proceed, tell me your relationship to the man you call 'Mr. Allen.'"

He stated briefly his acquaintance and business relationship, concluding as follows:

"As for Mrs. Allen, I had loved her two years before you overheard me avow it in the summer house. Whatever may be your mission, for Mrs. Allen's sake, I pray you keep our secret."

A sorrowful smile came over her face as she said:

"You may trust me."

"I believe you," he answered earnestly.

"Now you want to know why I am here and for what?" Without waiting a reply she continued: "I am not what I was. Last night I was a mad demoness with murder in my heart. Don't shrink from me, for I have a long, cruel story to tell you, and don't judge me until you have heard it all. When I saw the man I came to kill my courage failed me; he was in my power, for at sight of me he sickened with fear and fell helpless upon the ground; suddenly there came over me a relaxation of the murderous intent that I had harbored in my heart for many years. The rapacious thirst of a vengeful spirit left me, and my grip enervated upon the valued knife I premeditatedly planned to bury in the villain's heart."

"What had Mr. Allen done to you that you would take such a revenge? You are certainly mad," he interrupted with strong emphasis.

"Stay thy judgment," she exclaimed as she raised her hands pleadingly; "you are yet blind; when you have heard all I have to say you will then be more competent to say who I am—whether a ghost, or a mad woman. I am a wronged, wretched woman! The woman you love is no wife, nor ever has been. I am the legal and rightful wife of Martin, the dastard who calls himself Richard Allen."

"These are bold assertions you are making unless you have the positive proofs to establish them as facts. Where do you live?" again interrupted Norman, feeling enough interest to investigate.

"I am a native of New Orleans. When I married, twelve years ago, I was a wealthy heiress; after two years of unhappy association with Martin he abandoned me, stealing every dollar of my available money. I would not have cared—would rather have rejoiced at his going—if he had made even an equal division of my property; but he robbed me, taking all the ready means, the fiend! the double villain! even these knavish epithets are too mild to express the true depravity of his heart. I was proud—loved money and society—and when I found that my immense wealth had been appropriated by a vagrant, fugitive husband, I almost lost control of reason, and swore by the heavens and earth I would have revenge; I never broke that determinative oath until last night. I am satisfied now. I do not contemplate seeking him farther. He has seen me; he knows that I know of his vile treachery; I am going away to let him rest in peace—if his conscience will permit it. Those womanly instincts of virtue and modesty have returned to me, and I feel in a degree as I did in the earlier days of my life. But, Mr. Wellington, excuse my frankness, I could not leave this beautiful spot without making a confession of these things to you."

"Do you expect me to believe these statements upon your bare assertion? Allen a bigamist, an im-

poster, a dare-devil land pirate—preposterous!” he broke in excitedly.

“Mr. Wellington, do you take all I have said in the sincerity of a wretched, desolate woman’s nature, to be a base lie—a slanderous fabrication?” She paused for a reply.

“No,” he said slowly. “I am half inclined to believe you; only I must be cautious. But it is asking too much of me, or any one else, to accept the bare statement of a stranger without something tangible to corroborate it.”

“That I have, which I will show you before we part to-night,” she asserted as she thrust her hand into her bosom and drew out a small dirk knife made of finest Damascus steel. She held it up in the moonlight as she added: “Why should I have come a thousand miles and daily examined this blade just to slander him?”

Norman felt a cold chill shudder through him in spite of the confidence she had inspired. He asked:

“How long had you known Martin when you married him?”

“For over two years,” she answered promptly.

“Then you do not know that Martin is his true name?”

Meditating a few moments before replying, she said:

“I do not. He was never very communicative about his past. I don’t think he ever made reference to his early life during our association.”

“Where do you propose going when you leave here?” he asked cautiously.

“I am going home,” she replied curtly.

“Where do you get the money to defray your expenses and to keep your person adorned in such elegance?” trying to convince himself beyond any doubt that her mind was lucid, thus Norman questioned her.

She answered as if discerning his motive:

“I had several thousand dollars of entailed property which belongs to me during my life, and I live

very handsomely upon the benefits which accrue from it annually."

He believed, in spite of a strong inclination to disbelieve, that her statements were credible; however, he thought it would be best to detain her until morning, that he could see her in daylight and learn more definitely if her story were true. This was a question which concerned Lois, and whatever concerned her was of vast importance to him. He discussed in his own mind whether he should tell her of this night. Since he had known her his heart's secrets had been an open book for her perusal; but this, he decided, must be kept from her. If she knew it, her happiness would be hopelessly destroyed. He almost wished he had never heard the story of this woman's broken heart; its cries for pity awoke the tenderest sympathy, and its peals for revenge were as loud as enraged Nemesis could make it; he could never again have that respect for Richard Allen which had characterized his former conduct toward him.

"What is it that troubles you?" asked the sad voice, breaking into his meditations.

"Nothing of much importance; but how came you to trace Mr. Allen to this place?" He spoke without raising his head, wondering what would be her reply.

"I did not trace him to this place," she began. "After watching and searching for him for some time I gave up in despair and quieted myself down at home to pass the rest of my life in bitter regret. But suddenly I received private information, through an old friend of mine who was traveling salesman for a leading grocery firm of New Orleans, that he had seen Mr. Martin in Nashville, Tennessee; that he was interested in a banking firm and was universally known as Richard Allen. This again rekindled the old fire of revenge and hatred, and I suddenly disappeared from New Orleans to appear for the first time in Nashville. At the Nicholson Hotel I learned of Rosedale as his home, that he was married and absent from the city. I never was thoroughly satisfied that the

two names represented the same person until I saw in the library a life-size picture which I immediately recognized as my husband's. Before leaving home I wrote him a letter stating that I had at last found him and not to be surprised to see me at any time; but I withheld the main purpose of my visit."

Her voice mellowed until it was in harmony with the softness and solitude of night.

"Did you ever love him?" asked Norman in the same tone.

"Love him? No, sir!" she asserted, a little mortified at the unexpected interrogation. "I married him, but I did not love him. I married him because he was eloquent in speech and purported himself to be quite wealthy. Like most proud, ambitious girls, I wanted to marry rich. This is the sad consequence of it all."

"Do you think you can go home satisfied now, and that Mr. Allen's life will not be in further danger from you?" he again interrogated.

"Most assuredly I can," she said with a great deal of emphasis. "I have too much heart to murder any one, though they filch from me everything which makes life dear. No, sir; my heart has returned to that consciousness which will act as an ark of safety against all the crimes I have conceived since these troubles came. But do you contemplate giving publicity to what you have heard to-night and bringing the marauders into a court of justice?"

"Are you willing?"

"I have no objection if you think it your duty."

"At first," he resumed, "I was very much undecided, but taking all things into consideration it will be for the best to keep it a secret."

"I divine your motive," she responded with a woman's acute sense of reading a man's thoughts. "It is for Mrs. Allen's sake; you would shield her name. If Martin could be detected in his fraud she would be free to wed with you. There are some queer things hidden under life's surface, and the best of us often play a conspicuous part in the drama."

"Oh, well, I can't tell you about all these things. It is for Mrs. Allen's sake that I prefer it being withheld from the public. It is true, if your statements can be proven, that she is not married; she then would have a perfect right to marry her choice. I do not now propose to defend myself for loving Lois Allen or to reconcile conscience with any ethical code that governs society. I love her and that is all of it. I have striven with the strength of my conscientious nature to turn aside the current of my feelings but without success."

"You enlisted my sympathies very much that night in the summer house, although I was furious with angry revenge—yet I must have had some of the love left in me." She paused a moment as she drew from her bosom a small daguerreotype and a small parchment. Handing them to Norman she wistfully said:

"Keep these until in the morning; examine them; if after you have done so you wish to see me, call at the Nicholson House any time before six o'clock, p. m., to-morrow, for Anna Martin."

Norman placed the little bundle in his pocket; observing she was preparing to take her departure, he said:

"And this is the end of the ghost story?"

"Yes;" she smiled, adding, "I am ashamed of my conduct; it was the demon in me. Mr. Wellington, if the time ever comes when you need me, you will find my address on the paper I gave you. Write to me and I will act promptly in concert with your instructions."

"I will see you again to-morrow," interrupted Norman.

But before the sound of his words was fully gone, a pistol shot rang out on the still air of night—a hissing ball passed dangerously close to his ear, lodging in the beautiful forehead of Anna Martin. She prayerfully exclaimed as she fell dead upon the green grass, "My God! take care of my soul! He has murdered me!"

Poor wronged woman! She was no more upon

this earth. Norman, stunned and shocked by the whizzing ball and loud report, lost his self possession for a moment; but he turned in the direction from whence the sound issued, in time to see a retreating figure whom he recognized. Astonished and horrified he bowed over the form of the unfortunate woman, and examined for a symptom of life, as he thought to himself :

“Whatever sins I may believe Allen guilty of, I never thought he would have dyed his hands in ruthless murder. What crimes live beneath the smiling countenance of man, thriving best where hypocrisy is most skillfully laid. Horrible midnight murder! It is thus that man, in trying to cover the past, goes from one stage of desperation to another until overtaken by the tragedy of discovery.”

From that moment hence Norman Wellington believed all the poor victim had told him. There was not a deed in the annals of crime more inhuman than this one. He knelt down at the side of the dead woman. “What must I do now,” he queried to himself. “Must I make a statement of the facts to the authorities and let them act upon it? No, I will not do that. There is Lois, poor love of my heart! What will become of her? I can never do anything that will involve her fair name. No, Allen, you can go unhung if I am the only witness against you. I will sacrifice all for your wife’s sake, but how am I to explain it all? Ah! now I know. I will satisfy the public by stating she was a mad woman; when I was passing by the fountain we met, and while in conversation with me some one shot her. Will this explain it?”

Duped and trusting man! While he was there beside the dead woman trying to devise a falsehood in order to keep from implicating Richard Allen; a plot as selfish and nefarious as a human demon could make it, was being consummated against him. Whenever a man or woman surrenders all in their power for the benefit of another, the time is not far away when it will return unto them as cruel ingratitude.

Just as Norman was preparing to return to the house and tell what had happened, he saw Mr. Allen with several of the farm men coming toward him. "What does all this mean?" he asked himself, as they drew nearer.

"What is the matter here, Wellington?" inquired Mr. Allen, as he walked near the dead form, his face covered with a pale, dangerous expression.

"There has been a woman shot," responded Norman, as he looked straight into the guilty man's face.

Richard Allen did not have the courage to meet the bold, penetrating scrutiny of that look. The question he asked Norman was a base, empty one, and resounded back into his soul with frightful terror. The farm laborers who had accompanied him, eyed Norman with a curious and suspicious air. They—after having their minds prepared by Mr. Allen—thought he looked very mean, and could plainly depict on his countenance unmistakable evidence of his guilt.

"Mr. Wellington," said Mr. Allen, "it seems you propose being a little reticent upon this subject. 'Men,' turning to his employes, one of whom was an officer, "take the scoundrel and bind him. I'll have him put where he will be forced to talk."

Norman stepped back as he said:

"Mr. Allen, I demand of you an explanation of these proceedings."

"Why demand that when the cause is before you. These men understand what you have done. You have betrayed this woman and now murdered her," scowled the recreant murderer.

"This is a monstrous fabrication," reiterated Norman with a great deal of assurance.

This was a very trying moment to him. In one sentence he could have named the true murderer; in one sentence he could have named the true cause; in one sentence he could have justified himself. But *between that sentence* and his exoneration rose the fair and lovely form of *Lois*. If death—even worse—if disgrace came he would protect her with sealed lips. Richard Allen could do as he pleased he would never

utter one word to turn the tide of suspicion.

The officer stepped to his side and said with presumption :

"Mr. Wellington, you may consider yourself under arrest upon the charge of having caused this woman's death."

"I deny the charge," Norman affirmed.

"Do you mean to say that you are going to resist the law!" returned the constable with some will of dignity.

"I mean the law makes no demands upon me," he answered, as he saw three deputed men coming to the officer's relief. In a moment these rough yeomen threw him upon the ground and bound him hand and foot.

He did not make a struggle to free himself, but submitted to his fate with all the meekness of conscious innocence. He at once realized his situation; he knew unless he made a plain, unequivocal statement of this night's work he could never absolve himself from the charges that overshadowed him. To do this would fasten the crime upon Mr. Allen. Lois and Iris would detest and despise him above everything on earth as it was; but better this than to bring infamy upon them; better to have entertained a guest in their house who proved to be a murderer, than a husband and brother whose deeds could never expiate the law except at the gallows. It was the immolation of self for another, and when he thought for whom this sacrifice was made he felt a sweet sense of pleasure.

When the steel shackles were locked upon him, he hobbled to the chair where he was sitting when the ghostly appearance of Anna Martin aroused him from his meditation. From where he sat he could see every feature of her face. Death slept there, a monarch supreme; but he never reigned over beauty more serene. The moon played in its softest and loveliest sheen upon her golden head, surrounding it with an aureola of brilliancy. The death-marked cheeks gleamed like the petals of a calla lily when kissed by

the showering moonbeams. A pitful, earnest prayer went from his lips to die; he envied the peace which death had brought to the unconscious sleeper. His eyes filled with tears as he thought of the sad, irreparable history she had told him only a few minutes ago. He raised his eyes as he heard the sound of a familiar voice. Iris and Lois were standing over the dead form.

"Who has done this?" questioned Iris.

"There is the criminal—your lordly Wellington! See him?" sneered Allen.

"What you said this evening was not true?" Lois spoke with a sad expression on her face.

"That and more," he said with a cold, bitter accent.

Lois pressed her hands closely to her breast as a low wail of agony escaped from her troubled heart. She never thought to question the statement her husband had made. "It is all true," she repeated to herself. "I had felt overjoyful since our conversation to-night. Somehow I believed—I almost know he is the one I used to call brother in the far-off days of childhood. Ah! how much I loved him then. But oh! if he is guilty of this crime he must never know that I recognized him. I know he doesn't suspect it. Then the question came to her, "Did she love him now?" She tried to evade it but it would meet her with stubborn insolence. It was a question of love and pride—a real question.

"Yes, I love him, but to go to him, confess and express my sympathy will be of no advantage. But heaven grant he may evade the execution of the law!" Such were Lois Allen's reflections on this eventful night when Norman's heart never called for sympathy more pathetically. She often looked toward him as he sat speechless in the shackles of humiliation; she always found his burning eyes fixed upon her, but she kept near her husband.

"Iris came and knelt at his side, and when the guards were out of hearing she questioned earnestly, tears of sympathy pouring over her face:

"Mr. Wellington, tell me the truth; by all that is sacred, speak it. Are the charges brought against you true?"

"Iris," he said very low, "it is every word a base lie. Do you believe me?"

She replied as she took a seat at his side:

"I believe you; but tell me what brought this mysterious woman to Rosedale?"

"I feel that you are the the only real friend I have, and if you do not believe me, who will? I did not kill this woman, nor did I ever speak to her until to-night. They will after the preliminary trial consign me to jail. You see circumstantial evidence will be against me. Now please don't ask me any more—only trust me."

"I will," she said, as she looked at Lois.

Just at that moment Mr. Allen announced that the carriage was coming up the drive. Turning to the officers he added:

"Keep a d—l of a close watch upon that villian to-night."

"Mr. Allen, you are not going to send him away to-night, are you?" interposed Lois.

"Yes, madam, that is where he belongs, and that is where he is going," answered her husband.

"Iris," whispered Norman, "for my sake have the remains of this poor woman interred at Elmwood. Order it done nicely and draw a check on the First National Bank in my name to defray expenses," he added, as the men came nearer him. "Say to Mrs. Allen 'good-bye' for me."

Iris promised, and in another moment the carriage was drawn rapidly away, bearing an innocent sufferer to the city.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN PRISON.

They say this is a dwelling of distress,
The very mansion house of misery!
To me, alas! it seems but just the same
With that more spacious jail—the busy world.

'Tis done! I saw it in my dreams;
No more with hope the future beams.
My days of happiness are few;
Chilled by misfortune's wintry blast,
My dawn of life is overcast.
Love, hope and joy, alike adieu;
Would I could add remembrance, too.

Lois possessed naturally a very tender nature, yet, during the storms of grief which had bombarded her heart, it had been hardened with misery until the lineaments of her face were drawn with the cold iciness of pride, and there dwelt nowhere in her heart that tenderness compatible with her nature. So upon this occasion, after Norman had been taken to the city for safe keeping, she was erect—the indomitable monument of pride and disguised sorrow. She came up to the kneeling figure of her sister and placed her hand upon her head with an empty word of consolation.

"There are no words or entreaties which can console me now. Lois, your position is one that should arouse the sympathy of every christian in America," replied Iris, as she moved the death encumbered hand of the dead sleeper and placed it upon the breathless form.

"Well, Iris," Lois began pleadingly, "your tears will not undo the past or render the future more endurable. Then why this unnecessary grief?"

"Lois," interrupted Iris, speaking in a tone not audible to Mr. Allen and his men who had clustered together a few yards from the fountain, "unlike yourself, I have a loyal, true heart; unlike yourself I love principle and unshaken devotion to the sealed promises of the heart. I know your relationship to Norman

Wellington; he loves you as he does his own life, and you have made him believe that you returned it. But now when he most needs sympathy, and encouragement from those he loves, you, traitorous and cold, keep your lips sealed while he is bound and sent to jail under false charges without judge or jury."

"What you say is true, but under the existing circumstances who would not say that I have acted sensibly. If I have been deceived in Mr. Wellington, or even should I admit that I still love him, with this stigma upon his character what law of society demands of me to administer my sympathy?"

"Just as I had feared," answered Iris, "You still love Mr. Wellington, but your nature is so shallow that love cannot take deep root, and pride for a time crushes it. Under auspicious circumstances your love is heart-absorbing; but under trials and troubles, having an eye upon your own happiness, it, like water in the sun, evaporates and invisibly goes away. Lois, when a woman forgets all in the world but herself, she can never make a good man happy. You have ruined—you have forever blasted Norman Wellington's life. As he is being conveyed to jail to-night, the sorrow that lies closest to his heart is not this murder as you so willingly suppose, but it is your heartless indifference."

"I am sorry that I have been so cruel to your friend while he rests under this dark suspicion," responded Lois, sarcastically.

"The truth, Lois, is your pride and inordinate selfishness overbalances your sympathy."

"Have I a right to feel sympathy for a criminal? When he is exonerated from these charges, if ever, I shall tender him all I conceive to be due him;—"

Here Iris again interrupted, "you certainly have never entertained a doubt as to his innocence?"

"Most certainly I have. When Mr. Allen said he saw, with his own eyes, Mr. Wellington fire the pistol and overheard a conversation between them, which will be ample testimony to convict him, why should I not doubt?" retorted Lois, angrily, forgetting for the

time the tender and endearing feeling which her heart still insisted upon entertaining for the accused man.

"I am astonished at you after what I have heard to-night. Have you that narrowness and contraction of heart to permit your mind to drift in the same line of thought with your husband, and form opinions based upon his statements?"

"You speak of my husband in a most disrespectful manner; as far as the external grounds for accepting a statement from him at par with the truth they are certainly as favorable as those which support Mr. Wellington's integrity. Mr. Allen has unbounded confidence in the genuineness of his conversion while Mr. Wellington denies the divinity of Christ—even his oath is not admissible in court."

"I beg your pardon, Lois, for having referred to your husband in the manner I did. But I want to say some few things in which I will incur your disapprobation, but let that be as it may, I will perform my duty; you must know that Norman has materially modified his views upon man's final destiny. The fact that he disagrees with you on certain religious dogmas by no means impeach his integrity or sincerity. We are commanded not to judge men but to bear with their faults. The law that invalidates a man's testimony because of his disbelief in certain orthodox theories, is an infringement upon American liberties; it has the taint of religious bigotry about it. Lois, I love you very tenderly; if it were not so our estrangement would have taken place long since. I will be frank with you. I have very serious doubts as to the worthiness of your husband. I heard him assert this morning, 'that if God should call upon him for his soul, he could fold his arms in perfect peace and yield—without a regret—his life into the hands of eternity.' Lois, this is the best indication of a totally depraved heart, a conscience seared and ripened in its own wickedness. An active, living christian always has a very acute conscience, admiring that which is good and abhorring that which is evil; but when a man's heart is too dull to listen to the voice of doubt, his soul has

reached the hopeless and incorrigible state. Believe me, and if possible do not think it unkind, but Norman never murdered this poor, unfortunate woman. If her icy lips could but flush with life long enough to name her murderer, I am sure they would whisper "Richard Allen!"

"Iris, I cannot listen to this tirade longer. You are unfair, unjust to criminate him. Were you not my only sister I would not tolerate it."

"Why are you women still here? Retire at once to the house where you belong," said Mr. Allen, abruptly.

"I would like to have your men prepare a way and take this dead woman to the house; we want to dress her for burial," replied Iris, ignoring the command.

"Never mind about her; we will dig a hole somewhere and bury her without your intervention," ejaculated Mr. Allen.

"Oh no! please, Mr. Allen," interposed Lois, a little touched by the cruel remark.

"It is at Mr. Wellington's request that I desire to take charge of the body," said Iris.

"The coroner left the body in my possession—what did Wellington say about it?" inquired Mr. Allen sharply.

"He requested me to have her decently buried at Elmwood, and that he would defray all expenses," she answered.

"Another link in the chain of evidence which will hang the scoundrel," asserted Allen with a cynical laugh.

"I see nothing in it at all more than a common love for humanity, and a fear, if the burial was left to others, it might be indecently done," declared Iris, trying to control her feelings.

"You and Lois go to the house. I will attend to it all," commanded Mr. Allen peremptorily.

Lois turned her erect, imperious figure in tacit obedience, but her obstinate sister did not move.

"Do you defy me?" he demanded abruptly.

"No, sir; but I mean to superintend the interment of this body. I promised that I would and, unless prevented by force, I will, in defiance to your wish," she said emphatically.

Richard Allen, though almost furious with rage did not wish an altercation with his sister-in-law; thinking it not the best policy for him to interfere farther, he turned and walked away. Iris ordered some of the men to carry the dead body to the house, where she robed it in burial costume. The next morning the poor unfortunate, unknown woman was buried according to Norman's instructions. There was no further interference on the part of Mr. Allen. He spent the morning discussing the guilty appearance of Norman when they arrested him, saying it was quite bold for him to confess complicity in the crime after such a bitter denial.

"How has he confessed it?" they asked in astonishment.

"He has not confessed in so many words, but he has to my mind very strongly implied his guilt. What does it mean that he should have this strange, doubtless unworthy woman, buried among the sacred vines of his own family cemetery, and at his own expense?"

The listening crowd laughed as the idea dawned upon their stupid minds. Mr. Allen decided to convict Norman of murder if it cost him half his fortune.

"If men their oaths would sell,
He would buy them at the risk of hell."

This he considered the crowning climax of his life. If he succeeded now, the past would no longer trouble him; his future, he felt, to some extent depended upon prompt and accurate work. He never stopped to question the nature and extent of his crime; this was a secondary consideration. The full consummation of his plans was the prime object of the new, bold and daring assumption.

The news came that Norman had been incarcerated in a murderer's cell; that the populace were indignant over the cowardly crime. The papers stated:

"Another scoundrel unearthed." *"Woman's trust and man's duplicity."* "Norman Wellington, well known to the business circles of Nashville, proves a villain and betrays a woman. She follows him here and meets her death at his hands. The murderer now rests behind iron bars, where he awaits the vengeance of outraged justice."

Mr. Allen rejoiced in these reports; they would have a tendency to prejudice the people against Norman, and under such circumstances it would be hard to find a jury that would acquit him. He rushed into the house and found Lois and Iris in the library wrapt in the solemnity of bitter reflection; hurriedly throwing the morning paper at Iris, he said:

"What do you think of your paragon now?"

Lois had not raised her eyes from the book which she pretended to read; her proud heart, deaf to the cries of sympathy, remained unmoved, while an inapproachable expression of iciness relieved her face of its usual softness, transforming its cheerfulness into a beautiful picture, over which lay a deep shadow of gloom.

Iris hurriedly ran over the head lines; pushing the paper aside, she said:

"It is every word a lie!"

"I am perfectly willing that you have your own opinion. I have always heard that a woman was h—l after her own way," he said as he left the house.

As soon as he disappeared from the door Lois silently reached out her hand for the paper; having read the column devoted to Norman she let it fall upon the carpet at her feet, folded her hands upon her breast and sat in motionless meditation.

"Lois," asked Iris, "what do you think of the state of affairs at present?"

"Why do you ask me?" she replied coldly.

"Do you feel no concern in this matter?"

"If I do, what good can accrue from it? *Myself* is of infinitely more importance to me than what little pleasure I might bring to others by words of sympathy. I presume I am equally as anxious as yo

that Mr. Wellington will yet escape the punishment consequent upon these charges. But while the whole country is enraged against him am I going to jeopardize my standing in society by a voluntary confession of my belief in his innocence? If the opinion touching his guilt was not so universal, then my avowal of the same might be pardonable; but under the circumstances I shall live within my sorrows, the secret of my belief and feelings exclusively my own. I am a wife and must stay within a wife's place. I would not forfeit the respect of my husband and society for all the honor and love you can instill into a human heart."

"I presume, Lois, we have discussed this subject enough. Although you are my sister, Norman Wellington is a far better man than you are a woman. I overheard every word of your conversation a few nights since, and from that I am able to draw a correct conclusion. I am satisfied if Norman had given you the same cause for complaint you would have denounced him ere these dark shadows had fallen across our lives."

"Do not say anything more about it. I am getting tired of your advice," interrupted Lois with a graceful motion of her hand.

"Yes; I have a few more words to say, and then I will stop. Yesterday morning when Norman left, his last words to me were, 'Say good bye to Mrs. Allen.' I am going to Nashville to-morrow, and if the authorities will permit me I will see him," said Iris, sorrowfully.

"Tears involuntarily filled Lois' eyes and would have rolled down her cheeks, but she brushed them away. In her heart she was glad to know that he thought of her last, but her cold, resolute will was too stubborn to confess it. She hesitated a moment before commenting on her sister's words, then she said:

"You have a right to do as you please. I am sure you are of age and this is a free country.

She did not want Iris to do what she would not dare herself. While she had fully resolved to throw

Norman over to the winds it rather stung her when she thought of his loving some one else; yet she felt if Iris visited him at the jail his preference would become irrevocable. These thoughts troubled the seemingly resigned woman in spite of all her imperiousness. She reasoned with herself that these disturbing thoughts grew out of the impropriety of Iris making a visit to the jail to see a prisoner. What would the world say of such an act?

The day wore slowly by. Next morning Iris arose early, and softly entered her sister's apartment. She looked at the sleeping form with rapturous admiration. Lois' head, half buried in the white, downy pillow, was slightly turned on the left cheek, while her body in its smooth, rich plentitude, and undulating form, lay imperfectly concealed beneath the rumpled and angular folds of a summer quilt. "Had God ever done more for perfecting physical beauty," she thought, as she sat down on the bedside with her knees crossed in reflective comparison. "She is a beautiful woman and I am slightly her inferior," her thoughts ran, then she sank into a deeper and prolonged meditation. "I ought to marry; other women do who are far less beautiful than I. It would be better to be *an unloved wife* than to live an old maid—the refuse of man's fancy; nor can I bear the privacy and exclusiveness of a nunnery, where this natural curiousness and longing ambition would continue a ceaseless regret. A wifehood is but the courted sequel to maidenhood; it is the only avenue open for woman's replete gratification and contentment. Marriage, an institution as old as our ancestry in the edenic garden, has a sacred claim and charm upon every budding maiden, and she looks with unfading hope to the sweet realization of its blended mysteries. Yes, like all my sex, I abhor celibacy. Young women only act when they leave the world behind and enter the cloister; disappointed love and blighted hopes drive them to such desperation. Even the pious sister in her regulation dress is attracted by the pageantry of the world, and a lingering wish revives in her placid bosom to throw off the



She Slipped Her Arms Around Her as Their Hands Clapsed Affectionately.

saintly thralldom and take her place by the side of man as God has directed. But why do I poison my mind with these wild visions, for this delightful change will not come. Raymond will never return, and Norman—”

At the mention of his name she suddenly ended her meditations by rising from her seat and arranging the disordered quilt over Lois. The sleeper opened her eyes and said:

“What are you doing, Iris?”

“I only came to tell you good bye before I went to see Norman.”

“Sit down by me,” Lois commanded.

Iris obeyed. She slipped her arms around her as their hands clasped affectionately. “How long will you be away?” she continued, as she looked anxiously into her sister’s face. “I will be lonely while you are gone.”

“Not long,” she answered gently.

“Do you think it wise to go?”

“I had not thought on that side of the matter. If it will only be of cheer to him my reward will be ample.”

“You are devoted,” she said, painfully.

“Not more so than duty demands,” she replied, firmly.

“Go, but return as soon as you can.”

“Do you send any message? He will inquire of you.”

She drew her sister’s lips to hers and kissed them lovingly, and then turned her face sadly and tearfully to the wall without replying. Iris bade her good bye and departed for the jail. It was only an hour’s drive. Obtaining a permit from the authorities, she was soon conducted to the cell where Norman was confined. It was a dismal, miserable place, she thought, as her heart gave a deep shudder at the clang of the iron door as it closed behind her.

This was the third day of Norman’s prison life. He had become wholly resigned to his fate, let that be what it might. In the confusion of anticipation he

remembered the time when he entertained Richard Allen in his store, and more distinctly the remark which one of his clerks made in reference to him. Oh! how many hours of regret and repentance would have been spared him could he have but analyzed the wretch in the form of man on that morning; but alas! too late! too late! He had waited too long; now his innocent name was covered with calumny.

It lay within his power to wash his name from this slander and show to the world that he was an innocent man; but oh! what would be the terrible, the horrible consequence? Ruin and misery to another—his beloved Lois. No, he would rather suffer the mortification of disgrace and the agony of death a thousand times than humiliate her proud heart for one moment. Could he have known the condition and feeling of Lois' heart with reference to him, there would have been no change in his action. The rays of love which constantly emanated from his heart's throne were as invincible to his understanding as is the steel scimitar of time that plows irresistibly through the world every second in the day. No indifference on her part could ever change him.

On this morning a copy of Byron and the Bible lay at his side. The jailor had procured them for him. He had read the "Prisoner of Chillon," and "The Dream." These were the first two poems he had read with Lois. In the first hours of their association she had read them to him. Now, when he was alone, buried from the world of freedom and pleasure, he kept reproducing the sounds—"The Prisoner of Chillon." The circumstances existing between Byron's prisoner and himself were unlike, yet they both were chained in a felon's cell.

The time when Lois read "The Dream" to him was one of the happiest hours in his history. Even in his dark, gloomy prison, where the light of day never shone, or gay laughter ever heard, it was pleasant to recall that time. It was near sunset; they were in the library; he was reclining on the sofa by the west window; she drew her chair close to him as she said,

"Here is a poem—'The Dream.' I was reading it last night, and so forcible was the impression it made upon me that I want to ask the privilege of reading it to you." He had remembered every word she said to him. How breathless he had listened to the clear notes of her flexible voice. It was an evening of supreme happiness to him. He had thought how true, how irrevocable must be her love. Their lives almost reproduced the sentiment of "The Dream," and yet she had chosen this way in which to make known the exhaustless fountain of her love. The last verse had been indelibly impressed upon his mind:

"My dream was past, it had no further change.
It was of a strange order, that the doom
Of these two creatures should be thus traced out
Almost like a reality—the one
To end in madness—both in misery"

Which one of them he had asked would "end in madness?" and now he repeated the query with double force—both had ended in misery," but which should yield to madness. He prayed God that he might be the one. If it would meet the approbation of heaven he would bear every affliction intended for her. He had been reading the Bible studiously since his incarceration. This morning he came to a passage which filled his heart with that peace which passeth understanding. Thus he read: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised them that love Him." "For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat but it withereth the grass and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth; so, also, shall the rich man fade away in his ways."

Norman was pondering over these observations of James when Iris was announced. "So, also, shall the rich man fade away in his ways," he repeated slowly, as if to catch every idea conveyed. Better, he concluded, to lay up treasures in heaven that will not pass away, by enduring temptation.

A voice as soft as an angel's harp arrested

his attention. He raised his sunken eyes to meet the half-troubled, half-glad face of Iris. He held the tips of his fingers out to her through the iron bars, as he said :

"Iris, I am ashamed to see you. I have always entertained a lofty respect for my honor, and this is the last of it."

"Do not grieve yourself, Norman. I do not believe you are guilty. I came to offer you any assistance I may be able to render you," she said, softly.

"How is Mrs. Allen?" he asked,

"She is well."

"Does she believe me guilty?" he continued.

"No, Norman ; she is satisfied you are innocent," repeated Iris, as her heart filled with sorrow for the man who lavished his love upon a woman of Lois Allen's ingratitude.

"Did you obey my request in burying the unfortunate woman?"

"Yes, to the letter ; but let us speak of yourself."

"I am hopelessly ruined," he sighed.

"Would you not like to have your name and liberty again," she asked, as she nervously placed her eyes upon his face,

"Yes, if it could be done without any one suffering in my place."

Her face paled a little as she noted the meaning of his reply.

"What plans have you for your defense?"

"None ; I have not even employed a lawyer," he whispered, almost overcome with grief.

Iris drew from a hand-pocket a small locket ; opening it she said :

"Norman, I have never doubted your innocence ; but now I am satisfied that I know who is guilty. This locket I detached from the necklace which she wore around her neck. It contains the miniature of Richard Allen."

"Perhaps you are mistaken," said Norman, without betraying the least surprise.

"No, I cannot be mistaken," she said, emphatically.

"Then you would accuse your brother-in-law of this heinous deed?"

"Yes, I would. He is the one who did it, and he is the one who should suffer for it," she declared.

"If he was convicted of this crime, what effect would it have upon Mrs. Allen?" he queried.

"Of course it would mortify her very much; but that is not the issue; it is not right that the innocent should suffer for the guilty."

"But your supposition may be wrong," he suggested.

"With the evidence I have it would be hard to convince a jury otherwise, and Norman, you know something which you have not yet confided to any one. Please give me all the evidence in your possession."

"I will fully satisfy your mind upon one question, provided you make just such use of the evidence as I suggest."

She gave him her promise. He drew from a side pocket the picture of a man and woman on the same card and a parchment of writing. Placing them in her hand, he continued:

"The lady who was killed, according to her own statement, was the wife of Mr. Allen. He married her under the name of Martin as the marriage certificate will certify."

"That all seems to be true, but how came you in possession of these things?" interrupted Iris.

"I was out in the grounds the night of the accident. She came near where I was sitting and addressed me. At first I was uneasy, but soon finding out she was sane I listened to her story. After stating she was the wife of Martin whom she declared was Mr. Allen, she gave me this picture and marriage certificate. She said she came to this place with the determination of murdering him; but when she saw him that morning her courage failed her and she fled from his presence."

"Have we any way to test the virtue of her assertions?" interposed Iris, "by writing to the parties who witnessed their marriage, I suppose."

"This will not be necessary. I am prepared to believe her statements upon the testimony already before us."

"But how did she come to her death?" rejoined Iris, a little bewildered.

"Just as she was preparing to take her departure some one shot. Immediately after the shot, as soon as I could recover from the shock, I looked in the direction from whence the sound issued and saw the fleeing figure of Richard Allen."

"And you knew all this on the night of your arrest?" she questioned.

"Certainly," he replied.

"Then why didn't you make it known?"

"Because, as it is, I am the only sufferer; on the other hand, if Mr. Allen was publicly exposed to these charges yourself and Mrs. Allen would suffer the consequences."

"It is for her sake that you are assuming the consequences of this crime?" she queried, more surprised now than she had ever been.

"For you both," he sighed.

"When does your trial take place?"

"I think I was advised this morning that it would take place on Monday," he answered.

"I am going to keep these papers, and on that day you shall be liberated from these bonds and another put in your place."

"No! no! for my sake, do not," he protested.

"Norman, you are a fool about Lois. She cares but little for you. Are you going to utterly wreck your life over this affair? When she is convinced of Mr. Allen's guilt she will certainly not condemn you."

"Iris," he began, "you promised to use this evidence only as I might suggest. I do not want Mrs. Allen to ever learn the depth of her husband's villainy. Let me die in his stead; there is no other dis-

position to be made of my life that I prefer to this one."

"Norman," you are unjust to yourself. Lois would not permit this sacrifice if she knew it. But it is getting late, and I must hasten home. I will see you again the day of your trial." She placed her small white hand through the iron grate as she said good-bye.

"But, Iris," he said, as he pressed her hand gently in his, "you have not promised me yet."

"Trust me, brother. I will do right by you," she said as she drew her hand from his and walked toward the door, leaving the prisoner lonelier than he had ever been. All the horrors of a dungeon life rushed upon him, in one sad moment crushing to tears the happiest memories of the past.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TRIAL.

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,

And every tongue brings in a several tale.

And every tale condemns me for a villain.

—Shakespeare.

He withers at his heart and looks as wan

As the pale spectre of a murdered man.

—Dryden.

Iris left the prison with a full determination to counteract Mr. Allen's schemes regardless of what it might develop. There was a time when she would not have so readily believed Anna Martin's story, but now she was prepared to think Mr. Allen the basest wretch on earth. This was a trying moment in her life. One side of the question was her sister's future to be considered, and the thought struck her with full force: "Am I by one word to utterly destroy her domestic happiness and send her to a shameful grave?" On the other side, the principles of right and justice confronted her. All things being equal, she

would be willing to sacrifice everything for Lois' welfare; but under the present circumstances the voice of conscience was urging her out upon the path of duty.

But still it was a most difficult matter to make a final decision. She knew with a conscientiousness and certainty as powerful as life itself what ought to be done; but was she the proper one (being a sister-in-law) to execute this work? No; she felt that she was not. Norman Wellington was the one who should introduce these charges and have Mr. Allen arrested upon them; then she could come forward as a witness and produce the miniature and other circumstantial proofs. Would Norman do this? No; not even for his own honor and life. She had tried him sufficiently. His heart was firmly planted upon the protection of Lois' name and peace of heart. If she had the assistance and advice of some one she could trust; but it was impossible. This secret she could never divulge or trust to another, even in hope of wise counsel.

She discussed the question from every conceivable standpoint, but each conclusion had its defects. There was no available position for her to take by which Norman could be exonerated without incriminating Mr. Allen. One or the other must go down. Which must it be? Her heart filled with sadness and sorrow too painful to express, as she endeavored to dispose of the question in a way that would fully meet her approbation. The whole affair she felt hinged upon one thing, was it better to hazard the temporal and social interest of her only sister, or of her own free will let an innocent friend suffer a shameful death. In the midst of her struggle to cross the bridge of decision, and thereby arrive at a definite understanding with herself, Raymond Humphrey's name was suggested. If he were but at home she would trust her secret to him and risk all to his judgment.

Since the evening on which Norman revealed to her the nature of Raymond's and Lois' conversation

in the summer house, she had permitted her mind to dwell upon events connected with their life more than she had done before. Her heart was satisfied upon one point, which had often annoyed her—Raymond loved her; he told Lois he did, and above all things, she could not believe him guilty of deception. This revelation brought that peace and contentment which succored her strength for the conflicts going on at Rosedale. When the present troubles were over she had decided to make an effort to learn of his whereabouts and, if possible, restore him to his friends. She felt this was very presumptuous and bold in her, yet on the other hand, she had ample reason to believe he left Nashville under a mistaken idea, and that it was but her simple duty to correct the mistake. Though all the hatred and jealousy following the event had disappeared, when she thought of Lois' silence, she could not refrain from censuring her. There are certain inherent rights which the inmost soul claims, and when not duly respected by friends and associates, produce a spontaneous desire for retribution; however, if Iris had known the exact state of Lois' life since that moment, and more especially immediately succeeding it, she would have been glad to have rescinded even this little resentment of her heart.

As Iris drew near the gates which admitted her once more upon the beautiful premises she had so long called home, her heart grew sick and heavy with unpleasant reverie. "Ah! Lois, what a sad fate for us," she said to herself. "How can we endure the presence of this villain longer? I had a thousand times rather be dead than to acknowledge him as your husband. My sister; my unfortunate Lois, how did the pure instincts of your soul ever consent to marry him? And what evil siren has lulled to sleep the voice of conscience while you have sustained the sacred intimacies of marriage? God forgive every unkind feeling I may have entertained for you, and substitute sympathy in its place. It is in my power to keep you in ignorance of your true position and

thus preserve your equanimity of feeling for a while longer, but your soul had as well awake from its slumbering pillow of ignorance, and receive whatever punishment it has incurred, as to await the doom of eternity, when the hour of repentance will be hopelessly past.

"The sneers and scandalous gossip of society will not affect the true interest of your life; they cannot keep you out of your immortal inheritance. When you are made aware of the true character of your husband, the finer sensibilities of your nature will revolt with aroused indignation. Whatever you may have done in the past, I yet have too much confidence in your admiration of the intrinsically beautiful to believe you could confess allegiance to the man who would now be serving his time behind prison walls, were his deeds uncovered. But a still worse fate must meet your husband; he is a murderer—heaven only knows what else—and ruin and death will ultimately come to him. O, God! have mercy upon Lois, and when these truths burst upon her like a thunder-clap, sustain her with the strong arm of Thy power. I can never look upon his face or repeat his name again. Our association at least in this life is closed. If there is not some revolution of circumstances, I will bid a last adieu to Rosedale next week. I cannot remain under the same roof with him though an only sister entreats me."

When Iris entered the hall, not seeing any one, she proceeded to her room. If she had looked through the half closed door of the drawing-room she would have seen the stately figure of Lois standing near the north window, her eyes fixed intently upon some trailing vines and flowers which grew out on the balcony, with thoughts far away from these material objects of floral beauty. Though she would not confess it, she was consuming her mind trying to devise means by which Mr. Wellington could escape the penalty of the law. She longed to do something for him which no one would ever find out; if the world must know it she preferred to leave it undone. Her

mind went back to the scene at the fountain, recalling vividly to the light of memory the reference which he made to his little sister. She pressed her hand to her aching bosom as she controlled the contending emotions within. Ah! could it be after all, that he was the missing link in her life? She had often thought so, but had never mentioned it. Until a very recent date she was always so happy with him she never cared to change their relationship. It was too late now; soon he must die. At this thought her face paled until its imperiousness was softened into tenderness; but remembering her resolve, she walked away from the window, endeavoring to forget all but her own happiness.

The days passed slowly, bringing no new developments. The morning of the trial was at hand. Lois insisted on not going, but to give the matter an ultimatum Mr. Allen commanded that she should go, saying that her testimony was necessary to establish a very important fact in the chain of evidence. This was all her poor heart could bear. If Mr. Allen had seen Norman shoot the woman, that was enough proof to convict him, and she could not see the necessity of her evidence. In fact, she told herself she did not know anything corroborative of the charges. She did not feel that courage would be given her to testify against the man whom she had loved so passionately. All the slumbering fires of her soul had once been lighted by the torch of love for him, and the most delightful moments of her life were softened to unspeakable rapture while in his presence. His love had come like a beautiful dream and had vanished without leaving any consciousness of the moment in which it departed—though she was not fully convinced that it had ever been withdrawn.

"I don't believe I can possibly do this," she whispered to herself. "It is exacting too much." But she never made any complaint to her husband. After a long and painful contest with her own feelings, she decided that home life and home happiness were paramount in a woman's life and that, rather

than disregard her husband's orders, she would go and bear witness to such things as had come under her observation. It would be a bitter moment in which she walked into the presence of Norman Wellington and opened her lips as a witness against him. She knew her words would be painfully received by him, but he had better endure the pain of wounded love than for her domestic happiness to be utterly destroyed.

Thus Lois Allen reasoned with herself until she did not really know whether she still loved him or not. It was evident under moments of excitement she did not; but when none of the possible consequences were present, in justice to her we will say "she did." This morning when all was confusion the contrast in Lois Allen's past and present disposition had reached its climax. Sorrow, disappointment and self-reproach had grown upon her until the lovelier traits of her character had been lost in the scenes of worldliness that were being enacted around her.

On this morning there was a mechanical expression of coldness upon her face that repelled and rendered inapproachable the secret promptings of her heart. She was in the drawing-room alone patiently waiting the announcement of the carriage that was to take her away. Her mind was not fixed definitely upon any one thing; others had said what she must do, and there was no further demand for her own thoughts. When she heard the rumbling of wheels on the drive, she drew herself to a full height and left the room with perfect indifference; there was not a change in the stoical lines of her face; yet beneath the guarded emotions of the soul there were spontaneous traces of a deep and heart-felt interest in what she was doing. The supercilious smile that gracefully curved the faultless mouth, the inapproachable iciness which marked her studied deportment and the hauteur with which she attitudinized the magnificent head, all supported her majestic beauty superbly in its conceited arrogance.

Iris accompanied Lois and Mr. Allen to the trial, but they never turned their heads to speak or indicate

an interest either way. This fired him with anger, but he did not attempt to coerce them into more courteous conduct. When they reached the court-room Norman had been brought from the jail and placed in the dock, ready for trial. He had changed much during his imprisonment; his face had lost every trace of hope, and his pale features stood out a sorrowful index to his bleeding heart. He had asked the privilege of remaining in the cell, declaring that he had no interest in the trial, but this was not granted and he was forced to endure the mortification of being exhibited as a prisoner before the vast throng assembled to witness the day's proceedings. All the morning he asked himself the question, "Would Lois be there to witness his disgrace?" He knew Iris would because she said she was coming. Would she try to implicate Mr. Allen upon the evidence he had placed in her hands? "It would have been far better if I had kept my secret," he said to himself, as he entered the court-room unconscious of the many eyes directed toward him.

He had not waited long before Mr. Allen, Lois and Iris appeared upon the scene. Iris, in compliance with her frank and honest nature, went forward with an inquiry as to his health. Lois' eyes followed her, but when they fell upon the sorrowful face of the prisoner, she instantaneously withdrew them with a sigh of regret. When Norman saw the heartless, formal mein of her action his agony of mind and heart became almost unbearable. If she had only come and offered one word of tender, loving sympathy it would have cheered him for that day's emergencies.

Suddenly the solicitor for the State announced he was ready and desired to know if the opposing counsel was. For a moment all was breathless silence. The judge asked who was the defendant's counsel. Upon investigation it was found that Norman had not employed any. The attorney for the State said Mr. Allen, his wife and her sister, all important witnesses for the State, were present and that

he opposed the continuance of the case. But before any further action could be taken the sheriff and a tall, handsome form attended by two State officers, armed their way through the densely packed crowd. As they neared the bar a hush fell upon the eager listeners as they breathlessly watched the new developments. Silently the sheriff obtained permission from the court to make an arrest of Ike Ancil *alias* Richard Allen; then turning to Mr. Allen in a clear, full voice he informed him that he held a warrant charging him with the murder of Fred Russell.

But before he could read the other charges implied, Mr. Allen sprang from his seat, excited beyond control, his eyes gleaming with a desperate fire, he exclaimed:

"That is a lie!"

"The law and testimony must say whether these charges are false or not," interposed the manly voice of Raymond Humphrey.

"Who are you?" demanded the guilty wretch as his face turned ghastly pale with sickly fear.

"I am the attorney for the man you wilfully murdered in the wilds of Texas," Raymond responded, with unfaltering determination.

"You are an infernal liar! My name is Richard Allen. I know nothing of Ike Ancil. I never murdered any man!" emphasized the distressed and mortified man, as he made a desperate effort to regain his composure.

Iris, on hearing the voice of Raymond, clasped Norman's arm; she half rose as if to go to him, but composing herself to the surrounding circumstances, she resumed her seat at the side of Norman, where she eagerly, anxiously watched the proceedings. Lois' face turned a shade paler, but beyond this she betrayed no signs of emotion. The judge inclined his anxious face forward to catch every word that was being said; lawyers, jury and countrymen stared with apprehensive faces to learn more of this remarkable scene. Raymond Humphrey was recognized by numbers of his old acquaintances, which made the affair

more thrilling. Dumb silence prevailed as Raymond continued :

"It is not necessary to discuss this matter until it is brought before the jury. You are charged with murder and with other crimes as heinous in this warrant."

"But I refuse to be arrested!" interrupted Ancil in a tone of hopeless determination.

"Then you will be forced into measures," responded Mr. Humphrey.

"I call upon the good citizens of this city, who have known me for the last ten years, to protect me from this slanderous conspiracy!" exclaimed Ancil wildly, as his rage became more intense.

At this point the officers advanced to hand-cuff him. A hiss of discontent arose from the crowd, but none offered resistance, and soon Allen was overpowered and in the hands of the officers. A low wail of agony passed painfully over the lips of Lois as she heard her husband fall upon the floor; but with a resolution as inflexible as law she governed herself once more. Iris came and placed her arms around her, but they were both as silent as the grave.

Raymond Humphrey as yet had not observed their presence. When Mr. Allen was quiet he arose and said in a clear voice :

"This gentleman persists in proclaiming his innocence. I have one test to which I would like to subject him in the presence of this people."

Raymond paused and whispered to one of the officers. The man retired from the room; in a few moments he returned, accompanied by a tall, stately old man, whose long, flowing white beard covered his beneficent features. A smile of triumph lighted his eyes as he came upon the scene. Every eye was turned upon the mysterious stranger. Raymond asked :

"Mr. Loraine, do you know that man?" pointing to the person we have known so long as Richard Allen.

At the mention of that name Allen's face turned

as pale as death and his heart gave a quick bound, almost paralyzing him with dread.

The old gentleman replied as he looked up, wild with triumph and excitement :

"That is Ike Ancil! I wish to God I had never seen him. Ike, where are my children?"

Again every ear was strained to catch the words, and more than one heart beat in sympathy with his wild cry. Two beautiful forms had involuntarily arose from their seats and stood looking into the face of the old man. There was but one man among that immense crowd who remained unconcerned, and that was Norman. As Ike heard the voice of Mr. Loraine he unconsciously exclaimed, "Have my sins found me out?" But this was heard only by a few who sat near him.

Ike's courage had failed. The bold, dare-devil plan that had won so many victories for him over right was of no avail now. His wicked course was about run, and its terrible consequences were about to satisfy their vengeance upon him.

Mr. Humphrey continued :

"This is my home," and turning to the court he asked permission to say a few words bearing on the arrest. The court bowed his head and the young lawyer proceeded. "I left here several months since with a determination never to return, and had it not been for circumstances which I now relate, I would have kept my promise. After wandering through several States looking for a desirable locality in which to build up a law practice, I started from Meridian to Gatesville on foot. After pursuing more than half of my journey I neared a country house situated in the edge of some timber. A pistol fire aroused my attention. I hastened to the house. On the way I met a man going at a rapid speed, whom I now take to have been the prisoner." Ancil moved restlessly in his chair and perspiration rolled down his cheeks like drops of blood, "whom I then supposed to be going after a doctor. Again quickening my steps I soon reached the house. This sight met my eyes: This

old gentleman—an invalid—was lying upon a scaffold of a bed in one corner of the house. On the floor lay a man whom I took to be dead. He had been shot as I learned by the fugitive man. On investigation I found he was not dead, but that the wound would necessarily prove fatal. After dressing it the best I could, the sufferer said that he knew death was near upon him and that he was desirous of making a confession for the benefit of the old man whom he said had been greatly wronged. This is the confession I hold in my hand which I will read in full in order to convince you of the real character of the prisoner.

“‘ANCIL RANCH, TEXAS, June, 188—.

During the year 18—, I lived in the State of Virginia, a mile from the Loraine plantation. I formed the acquaintance of Ike Ancil and a close attachment sprung up between us. I became his accomplice in many petty crimes, but owing to Ike's association with the Loraine family (where he had lived for many years, and under whose beneficence he was educated as a charity object), we were never suspicioned. One day after our cunningness had ripened into more boldness and confidence, Ike came to me and said: ‘Fred, I have a big thing on foot, and if you will just stand by me we can make ourselves rich at one game.’ After I had assured him he could depend on me he continued: ‘Well, old man Edmond has a full pocket book of his own, besides he is guardian for Lois and Iris Earle.’ Here he paused and I said, ‘what of all this? Shall we wait until they are of a marriageable age, and then propose to them?’ ‘No,’ he said, ‘can’t you understand? I mean old man Ed is now about to die, and if we will play our cards well we can get into possession of his own money, also the guardian funds.’ I told him I would assist him.

“‘Well, here are my plans,’ he continued. ‘We must silence the lips of Ed Loraine, kidnap the girls and place them where their story will not be heard, and then we will take all available means and fly to the west. Everything seems to be in our favor. The war has just closed and men’s motives are not questioned like they are in times of long peace. Besides, the Earles and Loraines have no relatives to hunt us down even if our crime should be discovered. I have dropped something in old Ed’s glass to-night which will close his period of life. Suppose you and I go over to old Jessie’s to-night, kill him and cover the trace by firing the house.’ I involuntarily asked what we would do with Lois Earl and his adopted son, Norman Wellington. Continuing, he said:

“‘We will bring the girl away with us; and for the boy, if he is in our way we will consign him to the flames with the old

man. You know there is not a house within three miles of the place where he lives; and it may be a month before anybody will ever know what has occurred.' I consented; we proceeded across the mountain a distance of about four miles, reaching the place of action a little after dark. Mr. Loraine was sitting on the veranda enjoying his pipe. Ike stealthily made his way to a place from where he fired. Mr. Loraine fell dead upon the floor. We both hastened to the garden where we had seen the children. The boy was gone. The little girl was in a state of unconsciousness, whether from excitement and fear produced by the shot, or other causes, we never learned. After setting fire to the house we hastened away with our charge. In a few hours we had securely locked her in an old house off the roadside.

"'With quick steps we made our way to Ed Loraine's, where he lay sick with fever in a state of deep unconsciousness. Ancil thought he would be dead; in this he was mistaken. He wanted to finish him. I objected, so we decided to take him with us, feeling sure he would die in a few hours any way. We traveled all night. The next morning we had reached a point upon the railroad where we disposed of our spring wagon and horses and took the cars to Louisville. Ike, upon our arrival, sought a convent for the little girls. Here we, very much against the cries of Iris, separated them from their uncle. The two little girls were almost, if not the perfect image of each other. They were lovely children, with long black hair and dark brown eyes. After depositing a sufficient sum at the convent to meet the demands of the proprietress of the institution, we departed for Texas.

"About two months after our departure from Louisville we established ourselves at this place. Mr. Loraine continued to improve physically, but his mind for years remained in a state of perfect inactivity; since which he has had lucid moments, and I have recently believed it was being gradually restored. By this operation Ancil obtained a vast sum of money, a part of which he invested in this ranch. I have passed my days at the bedside of this old man. I have bitterly, sorely repented the hour I consented, but I did it in an unguarded moment, without considering the enormity of the crime. My social intimacy with Ike has long since closed, and I have never been able to extract any information from him concerning the children. Young man, may God bless you and preserve your strength to unmask this highway robber and bring him to a just account of the ruthless deeds he has perpetrated. I solemnly swear on this, my dying bed, that I have made a true statement. (Signed by) FRED RUSSELL.

"'Witness, RAYMOND HUMPHREY.'"

"The party to this confession bound me by a solemn vow to do all in my power to bring Ike Ancil before a court of justice. Soon after his death, to-

gether with Mr. Loraine, I proceeded to Louisville. On our arrival at St. Anna's Convent a matronly lady, who has been connected with the institution for years, received us. After stating our object she said she remembered the two little girls well; that they had remained with her until about ten years ago, when Miss Lois married a very wealthy man by the name of Allen, who lived near Nashville, Tennessee. We continued our search to this place." Here Raymond's voice quivered as he thought of Iris. "On last night Mr. Loraine, an officer and myself visited Rosedale with the object of getting a secret view of our man. Mr. Allen was sitting under the glare of a splendid light when we arrived. Mr. Loraine instantly identified him as Ike Ancil. Then we returned to the city and prepared our papers for his arrest, feeling our mission was about accomplished."

As he closed this statement the suppressed indignation of the crowd rent the court-room with cries of "Death to Ancil-Allen!" "Vengeance on the foul fiend!"

During these proceedings Ancil's face assumed a pale, guilty appearance; every word of Fred Russell's confession was true, and lay upon his soul an uncanceled sin. His heart wilted, but he resolved to govern his external appearance and keep up at least some signs of innocence.

The loud clamors were suddenly hushed as Iris, indifferent to all comments, hurriedly made her way to Raymond. She placed her hand upon his arm; for the first time he knew she was present, and bitter memory held him speechless. Placing her eyes upon his, without a word of greeting, that look spoke to his soul. In a clear voice she made a brief, concise statement of the facts concerning the Anna Martin murder, requesting him to so state before the court in petition of Norman's release.

The voice of the sin cursed man cried out: "Hast thou found me, oh! mine enemy? Surely the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things, the wicked is driven away into his wickedness and the end thereof

is death." His mind and soul became intoxicated with a delirious remorse for its own wickedness, and memory flitted across his wrecked brain the pursuing enemy clothed in sombre shadows. "Lost! lost!! lost!!!" he agonized, as his mind became infested with a thousand shapes of fury, whirling itself into a frenzied torture without one glimpse of reason or heaven. Chained to the rock of his own conscience, the vulture of mental regret fed upon the nerve centers of his life until he felt that death would be his best friend.

Upon Raymond's motion for a dismissal of the case against Mr. Wellington, the judge ordered the prisoner released. When the fetters were removed from his arms, he went to Ancil, calling him Mr. Allen, he said:

"Do not waste your time in these wild expostulations and vain regrets, but compose yourself, and if there is yet room in your heart for repentance, do not neglect it."

The criminal placed his blank eyes upon Norman; suddenly a dangerous, hellish gleam flashed into them and he sprang to his feet infuriated with an awakened sense of murder. Norman said no more, but silently withdrew, as they moved the prisoner to jail.

Lois' grief had burst beyond the ligaments of pride, and she fell fainting into Iris' arms. When her husband was carried away she was not conscious of it.

CHAPTER XXI.

DEATH RELENTS.

The shadows lifted one by one
Reveal life's bright and beauteous sun.

The astonishment, the sudden humiliation which Lois experienced on the occasion of her husband's arrest bore upon her nervous temperament until she sank into a long state of unconsciousness, followed by a

severe attack of fever. For two months her mind dwelt in that half uneasy state in which rest was often near, but owing to the unfortunate memories that perturbed her brain, it never came. For a while dim recollections of some half-known sorrow would rise up in the dizzy chambers of the brain and then as suddenly subside, leaving her in a state of nervous prostration and insensibility. Her mind grew delirious, painting phantasmagoric figures on every corner of the room. She would start from her pillow as if aroused by some hideous dream and then relapse into a fitful stupor of painless uneasiness. Finally a deep sleep settled upon the emaciated form, every one said it was the stupor of death.

The news came that Ancil had committed suicide in his cell; but his wife was too near upon the border-land of eternity to heed the message. Iris tossed the folded paper into the grate with an inconsequential air. Edmond Loraine turned pallid with grief, tears leaping over his furrowed face, as he breathed huskily:

"Iris, if it had not been for your old uncle Lois would have lived and you would have been happier. But it is better death than she should have lived the wife of such a man."

"My uncle, your presence in our home is a very high source of pleasure to me. You fill a father's chair and render my life useful in waiting upon you. Don't grieve upon the change in my poor sister's life. She was never happy. Her life was but the living reminder of a living death—only marriage without love *'is a failure.'* But, uncle, she may not die, though there is little upon which to base our hopes."

Truly Iris' observations were correct; there was but little in the pale, wasted form, in the lustreless cheek and sunken, death-haunted eyes upon which to base hope. "She is almost gone," was echoed around the room. A loving sister knelt at the bedside breathing a silent but earnest prayer. A grief-stricken uncle stood over a dying niece. Another form entered the room and stood near the weeping friends.

Looking down upon the colorless face, where the finger prints of death were almost traceable, his heart filled with a hopeless dread, as he breathed her name softly. At the first sound of his mournful voice the pale sleeper opened her eyes and looked about the room, but as suddenly closed them, a feeble shiver passed over her and she again sank into that stupor of complete prostration so closely allied to death itself.

"She is gone," whispered Mr. Loraine.

"As long as there is life, there is hope," said Raymond Humphrey.

Ah! no; Uncle Edmond, do not hope any more. She has nearly crossed the Jordan's stream!" exclaimed the despairing sister.

"Oh! my precious Lois is certainly dead! After all these long years of separation I have found her, she yields to the fiat of death because I came!" he exclaimed in a dry, hoarse voice.

"Don't lament because of this, uncle. You have not been to blame. Trust me; I know this is just one of those cases in which the unseen hand moves with mysterious purpose. You have acted upon the honest conviction of right," responded Iris amid her rapid cries of sorrow.

"Mr. Loraine, your self-reproach is natural, but it will subside as this over-excitement wears away; only try to behold God in this sorrow, and His promises will comfort you." rejoined Raymond, endeavoring to restrain his violent weeping.

But the one whose heart-beats echoed the most painful regrets stood speechless as death, the conquered, the sad wreck of a relentless woe. His mind had lost all fancy for worldly allurements and unconsciously wandered out into those gloomy regions where the life cord is almost severed by the soul's own wretchedness; while a tear did not glisten upon his white, rigid cheeks, the extremity of his grief convulsed his body like a paroxysm of pain. Could any one behold the mercy of God in Norman Wellington's life? Yet the human soul is reflected in its own history as having endured the affliction of the

world in order to gain an inheritance in the empyreal home.

Surely if the cruel, bitter chastisement could humble the proud heart or carry the soul through the critical and delicate process of refining, the magnanimous aims of the unheard voice were accomplished, for trouble, real trouble came to him with the dawn of love. But until he knew Lois the empty longing in his soul after real happiness was never once appeased. The parched lips that had ached a life-time for one draught from the crystal goblet of real pleasure, thirsted on until the wings of love cast their shadow over his pathway. But when the first impetuous gust was quelled by the counteracting gale of instability, the marble finger of grief touched his heart, recording another instance in human chronology where there can be no pleasure without pain, or *vice versa*.

Whether Norman Wellington's unenviable state of mind was but the legitimate sequence of the sin involved in transcending the formal laws of caste and loving a woman whom he recognized as the wife of another, or the predestined course outlined by those tyrannical Fates who preside over the destiny of men without regard to conditions attained through free-will acts, will not be fully known before the hour of dissolution. Yet, inasmuch as our hero has fallen a hopeless victim to that love from which there is no rescue, we feel inclined to add one word in his defense.

It has long been a question among physicists as to how far the *will* is controlled by circumstances independent of any free agency, either involving or repudiating all human responsibility. The Robert Owen view of this question is poisoned with sophistry, and is but an ingenious device to lure many irrefragably into the pitfalls of sin. These facts all entered into the young merchant's consideration when he first sought to allay the storm in his heart. It came upon him a sudden surprise, quickening his mind into the solemnity and abstractness of meditation; declining to intimate its purpose, it rushed into his heart, a tide divine, filling his soul with pleasurable thrills.

Truly, that sovereign which so often perplexes the mind, mystifies the soul, formed the inevitable, bending the human will to approbate the psychal impression,

"That arose from a vision fair,
But why no reason did assign,
Except the heart thought it a woman divine."

* * * * *

But Lois Earle was not dying; it was one of those instances in which the body sinks into that state of exhaustion closely allied with death, before the spirit has signaled the time of absolute dissolution. The body was gone, but it was called back to consummate its unfinished measure. It is impossible to determine how near man may approach the mystic borders of the eternal world and then be restored to health and vigor in this life. But we are safe in saying the corporeal entity of humanity sometimes passes beyond that line of earthly pain into the realm of gloom and unconsciousness which intervenes between absolute death and the various conditions of which the feeling of the body is an expression of life.

There is a half ethereal state of existence, after human endurance has lost its faculty of perception, in which the body remains passive while the spirit is dissolved, for a time, from its frail associate to ramble at will in the mystic gloom of the intermediate state until awakened to a sense of its utter loneliness by the indistinct recognition of an evanescent outline connecting the present with the past; then it flees back, reanimating the pulseless body and instilling new hope into the hearts of friends. So when Lois again opened her eyes with slight traces of their old lustre, weeping voices changed to joyful exclamations.

"Thank God, she is not dead!" some one said; "she seems to have awakened from a long, peaceful rest." "She is looking for some one," added another.

"What do you want, darling?" softly questioned Iris; but the graceful lashes again sought repose upon the wan cheeks; a gentleness and placidity of expression settled upon her face, impressing it with the sig-

net of perfect contentment. When her eyes had firmly closed Raymond said:

"Her manner was like one half aroused from a pleasant dream, and while under its delightful influence she endeavored to recognize some of the causes which had associated her mind with those possibilities that filled her heart with wild rapture; but on meeting a slight disappointment closed her eyes with the joyless hope of revisiting dreamland."

"It may be death this time," said Iris, her voice sinking to a sad whisper again.

"I think she has gone through the worst stage of the disease. That change which always decides the fate of such cases has taken place; she did not die; we have the strongest reason to hope for her recovery," said Raymond, trying to make Iris and Mr. Loraine more hopeful.

As Raymond predicted, Lois was not destined to die. A change had taken place which placed her physical frame upon a sure basis of recovery. Norman remained at Rosedale until he was certain she was out of danger, but he never went into her presence after she regained consciousness lest it might jeopardize her condition, besides her last conduct toward him was of that cold, indifferent type which involved the question as to whether his presence at Rosedale would be agreeable to her. He felt that it would not. Iris had invited him, as she thought, in the last extremity of life, that he might witness the last moments of the woman he loved.

Lois did not know he was there and would never have sent for him. That love with which she had made him so happy had distilled itself into nothingness; like mist before sunshine, it vanished; like the winds, it was fickle; unlike woman, it was cruel; it toyed and played with his heart until it was tired and threw it away, as a child would a toy it had wearied of. No, he felt that he had too much pride for his own individuality to impose himself upon any one. If she ever sent for him, he would go to her; he still loved her, but his heart had borne too many bruises

alone to ever ask her to lighten his burden or make a reparation of the wrong she had done him.

Several days had passed since the change came for the better, and she was slowly but surely being ushered back from the portal of death.

"You are not going away this morning, are you, Norman?" inquired Iris as she came into the library, where he sat alone.

"Yes, Iris; I can't stay any longer. Your sister is better now, and you know it will be best for me to go," he responded in a weary tone, as he looked vacantly about the room.

"Why do you think it will be best to go away? We would be pleased to have you remain at Rosedale as long as your business will permit."

"I am sure you would, Iris. I know you esteem me, but you forget that your sister would disapprove of your plans. Then, Rosedale awakens so many unpleasant and bitter memories that I know it is not best for me to remain."

"I think Lois will care more for you now than ever. While I have been prompt to condemn her cruel conduct, yet there are mitigating circumstances in her case which should soften our judgment."

"Iris, if the heart which beats within my base body was dead, my life would not be more destroyed than it is. The word—death—is but a taint expression of my wretchedness. I saw my hopes one by one depart, until I was reduced to the wreck you behold. Yet, Iris, in all my humiliation and distress, I have yet a single spark of pride which restrains me to secrecy."

"But, Norman, you are daily committing suicide. If you do not take some measure to disperse your mind of these gloomy forebodings, death will visit you quickly. Why make yourself so miserable about the affairs of this life? Surely Shakespeare expresses a practical idea :

"Some grief shows much of love;
But much of grief still shows some want of wit."

"Norman let me insist upon your acting on this idea."

"No; it is useless to advise me now; my heart has reached that state in which there is no hope for me. I am going away this morning, probably never to return."

"Well then, I must tell you my story. You remember Uncle Edmond and Mr. Humphrey came home with us from the trial?" He bowed assent. "I told Raymond of the mistake he had made. It may have been unadvised in me, but I knew he was greatly troubled and I wanted to restore him to his former cheerfulness. I accomplished it. A new light sprang into his eyes, and his face was aglow with new found joy. Sister has been sick ever since that day, and though we have not decided upon the date of our marriage it is tacitly understood that it will take place at an early day after Lois gets well. Promise that you will come if I send you word," she said, trying to lure his mind away from the distraction of its grief.

"Iris, if you but knew how little I care for life, you would not invite me."

"Yes, I would, Norman; I esteem you with a sister's devotion. Have you ever seen a disposition in me to disregard your feelings?" she asked, a ring of pathos in her clear voice.

"Your kind consideration of me will be remembered as a memento of your innate goodness. I owe you a life of devotion—years of gratitude. In deepest sorrow and worst humiliation, you alone were my friend. We cannot trust every one who has an oily tongue and honeyed lips; only those who have proven their love are worthy the name and honor of friendship. Byron best expresses my feelings:

"Though human, thou didst not deceive me;
Though woman, thou didst not forsake;
Though loved, thou forborest to grieve me;
Though slandered, thou never couldst shake.
Though trusted, thou didst not disclaim me;
Though parted, it was not to fly;
Though watchful, it was not to defame me,
Nor mute that the world might belie."

"Iris, my heart will never cease to beat with the tenderest memories of you. Your charitable demonstrations in my behalf are all I have left to treasure as a token of the world's charity. Mr. Humphrey and yourself have the sincere congratulation of my heart. May your path through life be strewn with flowers and the atmosphere you breathe be sweetened with the aroma of perpetual love. Now, sister, I must bid you adieu, and please do not entreat me, for my heart is already sore with pain."

Iris endeavored to detain him by insisting that he should speak to Lois, but it was useless.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

Nor custom, nor example, nor vast numbers
Of such as do offend, make less the sin.
For each particular crime a strict account
Will be exacted.

—Messenger's Picture.

Life is taken to punish the example, not the guilt.

One month had gone since Norman Wellington's departure. Lois had regained sufficient strength to walk about in her room. Another month glided by before the wedding day. There never was a happier or more congenial couple led to the altar of love than Raymond Humphrey and Iris Earle. Proud of their lives because of each other, they assumed these new responsibilities with faces triumphant with the glow of contentment and hearts buoyant with hope. There was nothing in the myriad pages of memory to pierce their hearts with regret or immerse conscience in the fire of self-reproach.

Owing to the delicate attention which Lois' feeble and yet precarious condition required, their honeymoon was passed among the quiet beauties of Rosedale, where they settled, making it their permanent home. Mr. Loraine, whose affliction had passed

away, leaving him a healthy, vigorous old man, became the revered object of their tenderest care. A hideous past was absorbed in the complacency of the present, and they were in the noontide of blissful supremacy.

The shadow of a direful melancholy fell across Lois' pathway, benighting memory and leaving life in a wakeful stupor. She had been mysteriously preserved from the cheerless, silent tomb; some invisible incomprehensible touch arrested her soul and gently, imperceptibly rescued it; but that transformation which was wrought in her social temperament and disposition was as well defined, as absolute as if the chilly hand of Azreal had led her across the dividing line of time and eternity. The proud, stoical nature, both pathetic and inapproachable in the vast latitude of its variableness, had been reconstructed into calmness—an imperturbability which always follows the resignation of the soul to an implacable sorrow. The expressive face, once so radiant and cheerful—though there ever lurked the fitful shadow of melancholy so indispensable to the real perfection of beauty—was ghastly and emaciated, bearing the signet of untimely depression.

Almost two years had elapsed since her illness, yet there were no traces of returning cheerfulness; the glad mein of a smile had ceased to sway her marble lips from their graceful repose or dispel for one moment the gloom of her presence. Her heart had undergone one of those complete ultra changes which occasionally metamorphose the fundamental characteristics of a human life into a secondary state, in which the mind is affected and controlled by different influences than those which gain the ascendancy over the normal state. The old habiliments of nature were gone—hopelessly gone—leaving her the monumental wreck of relentless destiny, drawn into that gloomy abyss of despair over which the crucial, hard-hearted world moved, deaf to her pleading cries; even time possessed no curative properties; that disease—the destroyer of life's pleasures—had seized upon the

heart and triumphed so long that it had become a part of herself.

Iris, watchful and tender, used every means to bring about a restoration of those conditions in her sisters health, when she might resume her former interest in the affairs of life. Plans of travel were studied and proposed, but Lois, invincible to entreaty, rejected them all. She was indifferent, obstinate and even cruel to these solicitations; she protested against any further communication with the world, and hated the interference and existence of others, herself as well. Three years of this strange gloom and quietude prevailed at Rosedale, before its melancholy monotony was broken; a favorable change came over her. One afternoon late, during the time of this hopeful transition, Iris entered her room. She was standing attired in the softest, sheerest silken weave. The first marvelously delicate curves, that start with strange fascination and evanescent lines near the throat and end in sublime prominence,—the virgin solidity and fullness of the bosom,—as well as the ample breadth and faultless undulation of the hips were intensified beneath the clinging folds of the filmy material; the superbly turned arm—exquisite and fine in its luxurious softness, so white that it was impossible to tell where the dainty meshes of her French chemise began—ended in an aristocratic hand, that held a small mirror before her, with the other she pressed the waving ebony hair, falling in rich abundance about the supple figure, lent a weird beauty to the mystical face that seemed vainly trying to recall its own dreamy eyes and mournful features.

She asked if Mr. Wellington had been at Rosedale during her illness.

On being told that he had, she arose from her seat to leave the room; but Iris detained her.

“Would you like to see Norman? I am”—

“O, no, I did not mean that,” she interrupted, her voice sad with regret.

Iris believing a further continuance of the subject would be unpleasant let the matter rest. Lois again



Lent a weird beauty to the mystical face that seemed vainly trying to recall its own dreamy eyes and mournful features.

turned to leave the room, but Iris again interrupted her.

"Where are you going?"

"Out for a short walk," was the soft reply.

"Mr. Humphrey is coming; suppose we go out for a drive; the moon will shine. Think how long you have imprisoned yourself within the narrow limits of these grounds; Lois, our hearts beat with the tenderest love for you and our deep anxiety for your health is shown in our efforts to cheer you into your former state of happiness."

Lois calmly shook her head, a vague, far-off look on her face. Iris knowing that entreaties would be useless said tenderly :

"You are too weak to go out alone, let me ring for Fanchette, or, if you prefer, I will go with you."

"No," she answered sadly, "my strength is sufficient. Solitude is my dearest companion. If there is one thing I long for above another, it is to be alone. If in the grave I find endless solitude, I will have my only hope realized."

"Lois," said Iris pleadingly, "for your own sake, be more cheerful. God will meet you at the grave, but unless you continue in his words it will not be a happy meeting. You must *ever* have *companionship*; *solitude* is nowhere to be found. It is either death—*eternal* death—or the companionship of *angels* and redeemed saints. God's promises are for those who are in distress. 'Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.' And don't you remember that beautiful verse in Revelation, 'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.'"

"I know you are kind, but my grief is greater than I can bear; *now* I have told you, leave me alone," she pleaded, the wandering, dazed look in her face.

"One more word and I will not keep you longer. I know your burden is greater than you can bear. Do not try to carry it; but go to Him who promises

rest; for he says, 'if you have sorrow, I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man can take it from you.' These utterances of Christ, so full of love and compassion, of themselves should solace your weary troubled soul into that peace which 'passeth understanding.'"

Lois resumed her seat, but indicated that she wanted to be alone. When Iris had left the room, impelled by an indefinable motive, Lois sauntered out into the grounds where she could see the sparkling fountain, hear its soft, musical murmur, and inhale the dew-laden odors from the trees and flowers. It was one of those moments that connects waning twilight with the deeper shades of darkness.

Her mind lost in the labyrinthian circle of monomaniacal bewilderment, a power incomprehensible directed her footsteps along the terraced walk that led to the haunted spot where she had met Norman on the night of his misfortune. But it never occurred to her that fate, or the imperceptible influence of the past were swaying their magic sceptre over her as she with an indefinable sense of pleasantness approached the rustic seat. Why a feeling of anxiety possessed her to revisit the memorable place that had been the witness of such a frightful and tragic event, is inexplicable. Her mind was clear of any abstract realization of the cause which might have signalized the mysterious movements. Those events in which Norman Wellington's name was associated were absolved from her present state of consciousness, leaving her to the mercy of those influences which only exert their power while the will is mesmerized or has otherwise sought a state of passiveness. Reaching the rustic seat she sat down, her mind still in that state of peaceful inactivity.

Over three years had elapsed since she had been wrapt in the solitude of this magnificent scene. Encumbered by the distracting sorrow of a long, merciless grief her mind detaching itself from the body would wander into those beclouded, pathless regions, bordering on the unknown, penetrating no further into the

receptacles of the past than its own gloomy, desolate habitation.

During that period of time which connected Ike Ancil's arrest with the days when she had received sufficient strength to sit up, her mind was totally blank, with one exception. On this night while the scintillating stars and the soft refulgence of Cynthia lent inspiration to her soul, and as it went back into the mysticism of that single exception, she became lost in the wild estrangements of her own thoughts.

"Where was I?" she began, her mind in that fitful, dreamy state between absolute repose and perfect consciousness. "On either side of me were gloomy impenetrable walls, different from the walls of other prisons, for here the mind immured could not escape. I looked upward toward the far, invisible sky; I heard a sound such as I never heard before; it pervaded my strange, sombre abode; looking around, I expected to see the material form of a person; disappointment awaited me; there was no sign of any one. I was in that chasm over which disembodied spirits are led by the Angel of Death. Vague outlines of spiritual entities were flying over me. 'Death is doing its work rapidly,' I thought. Then came the idea that the dying of all climes must come this way. It became evident that I was sinking deeper into the awful gloom and that my situation was becoming more precarious.

"The sound I first heard followed me, its tones grew more entreating and natural. I listened to learn if any intelligence was being conveyed. The modulations were very indistinct but they seemed addressed to me and I caught the words, 'come back! come back!' as they were whispered in my ears. A spectral form appeared at my side. Pausing in my descent, eyes which I never possessed in my mortal state were opened. My body and soul were in a state of dissolution; becoming alarmed at the solitary desolation of my surroundings, the horrible condition of my loneliness became apparent. By some inexplicable means I was carried back through the dismal horrors

and I entered the chilled tenement of clay. I fell asleep in the arms of exhaustion; a long, long night ensued in which I knew nothing.

"Was this all a dream? Yet dreams have some association with real life; but oh heavens! what is there in this fanciful hallucination to awake the hope that my sorrows will be crowned with a blessing."

Lois had closed her eyes and let her head fall upon her arm. Her face in its exquisite beauty never looked more akin to heaven than on this night as it reposed under the slanting rays of the shimmering moon, contrasting its snowy complexion with the jetty lashes, the over-arched brows and the raven tresses.

A handsome, but attenuated figure with almost noiseless steps came from an opposite direction to that from which she had. Without observing the presence of any one he threw himself upon the green sward his head nearly touching her feet. Fatigued by travel his eyes closed in rest. This spot, although it had been the witness of a great crime, was the dearest place on earth to him. Lois, with her eyes still closed in mystic meditation, heard not the weary man fall upon the velvet couch. Her silent reverie was unbroken.

"I would to heaven I could forget him. Norman, what magic power have you over my heart, that I am your slave? It is whispered by the evening zephyrs that your love is not dead; but how can that be? The spirit of justice and revenge contravenes it. My sins, my selfishness and my obstinate pride have come up before me as witnesses of my cruelty. Will this wretched *night of sorrow* ever end.

'O, dark, dark amid the blaze of moon
Irrevocably dark; to total eclipse
Without one hope of day.'

"Yes, I am quite sure he does not love me, or why could he have gone away; but perhaps his leave is to that eternal home of rest. Why should I expect him to love me? When he was slandered and in prison

I renounced all allegiance to him. It was a cruel sense of right—a most cruel fiend—that entered my heart and chilled it with that indomitable pride, which gave me the power to humble and disown the only man I ever loved. He would have died for my sake; but when his name was shrouded in calumny, and his innocent body languished behind prison bars, he preserved silence to protect my name. If, in the last hours of our association, I had been kinder to him, all this sorrow might not have come upon me and my life would have been interspersed with a few peaceful moments; but as it is—by the frightful consequences of my own pride—I am plunged into that hideous region from which there seems no hope of escape.”

Here she paused a moment, lifting her arms and face heavenward, she cried in a pitiful, hopeless voice.

“Come back! come back! That I may make some reparation for my folly. Leave me not, I entreat you, to this horrible relentless destiny. O, Christ, Thou who for awhile endured the depths of human misery, make a special intercession with Fate that every ray of sunshine may not be withdrawn from my pathway.”

As the notes of her pleading voice floated out upon the solitude of night, the influence of a delightful enchantment settled around the weary form at her feet. For a moment a celestial breeze fanned his soul to speechless ecstasy; but as the dying echoes were wafted away the delicious spell was broken; he arose to a sitting posture, blind with rapture, his spirit hushed by the tranquil scene of the hour and his face aglow with the thrilling, dreamy indistinctness of what he had just heard. He said:

“O, eternal love, hast thou again visited this sacred spot to sing the accompaniment to the music of the murmuring water and the whispering wind? I have heard the soft notes of thy voice pleading in distress. Was it but a dream? Where are you to-night, Lois, that the winds speak of you?”

At the sound of a human voice upon the stillness

of the hour, she opened her eyes to behold the outlines of a man sitting at her feet; but there was a strange attractiveness about the melancholy face which not only chained her motionless under a spell of resistless facination, but instantly awoke that sympathetic response which forms a kinship between those who are fellow-sufferers in the bitter adversities of life. At first the impulse came to flee away from him; but she suppressed it as she became entranced in a solemn study. "O, that sorrowful face!" she thought as she queried in a gentle, smothered voice: "Who are you?"

The moon was curtained by a sombre cloud yet under its shadowy and flickering light, he recognized the wasted form of the speaker as that of Lois; recovering from the first shock of surprise, he exclaimed: "O, my God! where have you been that you look so ghastly? Are you dead and this your spirit returned from heaven to make this spot more sacred?"

When Norman placed his eager eyes upon her the recognition was instant. Again she thought to fly, but was held in his presence by a power stronger than human will. She remained silent while her mind seemed to be gathering some of its old strength.

"Speak to me, my darling; this excessive suspense is more than I can bear," he exclaimed almost wild with doubt and anxiety.

The influence which fell around her, wielded by the sound of his voice, was as gentle and imperceptible in its operation as the distilled dew of morning, and the soul so long the hopeless vassal of grief, was transformed into a state of tranquility in which the empire of mind received its full coterie of strength and gave her once more a lucid perception of her environments. She answered calmly, suppressing surprise:

"No, Norman; in the ordinary acceptation of that term I have not been dead, but in its metaphysical application I have. But tell me, where have you been, and how came you here to-night?"

"Lois, you are but the shadow of your former self;

my soul yearns to know of your life—that individual life which embodies the whole of mine,” he exclaimed passionately. “But, my queen, with an anxious heart I bow to your will and endeavor to answer your question. I hardly know. Two long years ago I left Rosedale, as I thought then, never to return. Darling, my only object was to forget you. I loved you so tenderly, so madly, and stern reason forced me to believe my presence hateful to you. Disappointed and wretched I left, hoping time and travel would conquer the love that had been the source of untold misery and had ruled my life with an iron will.

“Soon the blue Atlantic rolled between us; a month was spent in London, with a terrible longing for home consuming me. Determined to leave my troubles behind, I went to gay Paris; my love followed me. O! it seemed a part of myself. I continued my travels to the far East, where I sought rest in the study of the quaint old pictures and cities which seemed to breathe the once greatness of fallen empires. Finally dejected and disappointed, I turned homeward.

“Two months ago my feet again pressed America’s balmy land, the same wrecked and unhappy man I was when I sailed for Europe. I renewed my resolutions not to return to Rosedale, and embarked for the western frontiers; but there too, whether on desolate plain, in the rugged, towering mountain, or near by the ever sighing rivulet, the past—the wormwood of grief, mingled with myrrh of happiness—was my only recollection.

“But I endured it all until one lovely evening while sitting near my camp fire, there came upon me a spirit of dissatisfaction which the magnificent scenery of the surrounding mountains could not dissipate. All my boasted resolutions gave way before an indefinable longing to see you. I threw down the gauntlet of volition and human pride before the empirical logic of Fate and came home. I did not expect to reveal my presence to you. I only designed to look quietly into your face once more and then go

away. Now, tell me of yourself; I am so anxious to know."

"Lois began with the first dawn of memory since her illness, giving by detail the gloomy events of her life. Norman assured by the pathetic recital of her story that her heart, amid all his doubts, belonged to him, arose and seating himself by her side would have clasped her in his arms, but anticipating his intentions, she raised her hands in objection as she said:

"Do you love me?"

"Lois, why can you doubt me? What greater evidence of the reality of my love can you demand than what I have given?"

"You do not understand me, Mr. Wellington. I feel that I am unworthy of your love and devotion. For your own sake, think how much misery I have caused you and ask yourself, can it ever be forgiven; after having seen my face to-night, robbed of its former lustre, you will easily forget me. A few months and my image will be no more in your heart."

"Lois," he began, "I think you are a little unkind. It is not necessary for me to repeat the story I told you in these grounds a few years ago; but I assure you every word is as true now as then. Your conception of the sentimental does not comprehend the magnitude of my attachment. In the earlier days of our association, when you were in constant fear of my instability, I assured you then that time would never change the *relation of my heart to you*; an absence spanning a lifetime cannot wear away the golden ligaments of *real love*. Yes, Lois;

'Still I love thee:—Time who sets
His signet on my brow
And dims my sunken eye, forgets
The heart he could not bow;—
Where love, that cannot perish grows
For one, alas! that little knows
How love may sometimes last;
Like sunshine wasting in the skies
When clouds, are overcast."

"Only give me the assurance of your love I once

enjoyed and all the bitter past will be forgotten in the transport of a moment," he implored anxiously."

"Norman, for your own sake, reconsider this matter; think when I was under the iron bondage of pride, how cruel and ungrateful was my conduct;—then, how could I give you that assurance of my love you once had. I know you could not accept my simple statement as then," she answered, and she realized to a fuller degree how much she was loved.

"Lois," he responded his voice betraying deep earnestness, "if we love each other why go back into the gloomy past to borrow trouble—

'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'

Though at times I felt you were both unjust and ungrateful, yet I never treasured an unkind thought of you. Let us forget these sad memories, give them a place in the oblivious past where they belong. There is but one thing needful to dissipate my grief and restore my happiness."

"What is it Norman;" she asked, her eyes radiant with unshed tears.

"The one constant and undivided love of your heart consecrated upon the altar of matrimony," he answered passionately.

"Norman, will you believe me now?" she asked.

He bowed his head as she continued:

"My heart has always been yours; even when a child I loved you.

"My joys were so many while in your presence that I knew they would not last; but now nothing, save death, can ever separate us;—a happiness, a delicious hope comes up from the burning altar of grief. Will this kiss convey to your soul that evidence of my feelings which will tranquilize it into the rapture of confidence?" With these passionate utterances she threw her arms around his neck after the manner of her old frankness.

"Darling, this is a supreme moment, coming in the darkest hour of sorrow and misery. After all our humiliation and shameful sin, we are to attain the goal

of perfect bliss," he whispered as he pressed her tenderly to his bosom.

Placing her hand over his mouth to signal his silence, she said :

"This is the golden period of my life which will last until the sun has gone down—it is the prophetic dream of the wretched past and the materialization of our sweetest and fondest hopes—it is the blissful mystery of two hearts blended together and fated to one destiny—the music of one anthem,

‘Love the silver link, the silver tie,
Which heart to heart and mind to mind
In body and in soul can bind.’

A painful reflection crossed the radiant face and its glowing beams faded into twilight, as she whispered :

"You cannot forget the past—your imprisonment and my heartlessness. I shall ever be to you a changeless representation of our mutual folly." She raised her hands in shrinking horror as if to ward off some approaching, deadly heaviness, and exclaimed : "*It is God's terrible retribution.*"

Iris, who had been a joyful witness of Norman's return, stepping from behind a lilac bush, to which she had followed Lois in watchful care, threw her arms around their necks and said in tearful gladness :

"Norman, this evening God has bountifully answered the one long and anxious prayer of my heart." She would have continued, but her voice petrified, and it was the last happy word spoken. An unearthly transformation came over Lois. The star of happiness went down forever ; reason—the most idolized of all earthly endowments—surrendered her sceptre.

The lustrous eyes grew distant and star-like in their arctic beauty, and the passionate, intellectual and mystical face with its amplitude of brilliant and subtle charms shed its foliage and in its place an unnatural statuesque of marble with the hollow emptiness of death about it. In a moment, under the fierce indignation of God, the pride, the hope, the unbend-

ing haughtiness, the conflicting emotions, the love of admiration, the radiant and beautiful reflection of her heart sought a common grave, and this woman who had flirted with the sunshine of stolen bliss, possessing the exclusive art and necromancy of her sex to attract and control men and who lived after the fashion of her own selfishness—a skeleton pigmy in the church—a mournful and melancholy illustration of stranded worldliness—relaxed her hold upon the mental and spiritual sensibilities of time.

If it were left to the human will, the long line of fatalities would end here and have their sombre shadows kissed away by the lips of love. But again the interposition of Supreme Fate arraigns man before the inevitable, where he is destined to live in the gloom of what “might have been,” as he sees with sorrowful eyes the last straw of hope burned on the altar of an ill-spent life—the wrathful visitation of God’s displeasure.

The fibre of superstition, the half prophetic, half illuminating symbols and psychological mysteries interwoven into the meshes of realism all end, and are of no more importance than the wild dreams and fancies of an over-sensitive and outraged conscience.

The anomalies of the human mind are no less understood than the gigantic oak, a sleeping embryo in the tiny acorn.

It is well that finite vision is scarcely reflected across the horizon of to-day, for who would meddle with futurity if by the increased intelligence the misfortune of to-morrow could be averted. The human body suffering from a chronic infection may have intermittent moments of relief from the encroaching bacteria but the extermination and the full restoration of health will be difficult. So much so, when permanent recovery is assured the slightest provocation may cause a return of the retreating malady. The aberration of the mental or moral sensibilities will be found no less intractable. We have no love for the speculative theories that endeavor to explain the incomprehensible manifestations of the human mind;

there is a boundary wall around the occult sciences too high and too thick for human brain to demolish.

We rejoice that our obligations cease with the simple office of stating facts—we should say strange facts—for we don't remember to have ever seen anything so strikingly singular as the incident we are about to relate.

* * * * * * *

Twenty years have anchored on the bosom of time and no festive marriage bells have been heard at Rosedale. Two ebony caskets have been filled with the precious dead; the aged uncle and the devoted husband are no more. Sad heart—word of no meaning—when the bereaved wife dwells on the bitter and unforgiven past, but even then the painful reveries cease when Master Raymond and little Lois come and stand at her side. As she looks into their lustrous eyes, she sees the image of father and mother reflected, and it is then her calm face—aglow with smiles of blissful meditation—is the beautiful index to a rapturous heart that knows *marriage is not a failure*.

* * * * * * *

It is one of those serene moments between fading twilight and absolute darkness. The sombre shadows are creeping over the hills; the heavy breathing of a distant train and the hoarse shriek of a departing steamboat supplemented with the rumbling pulsations of the city break upon the solitude and monotony of the melancholy hour. The children are weary with the day's romping and have fallen asleep on their couches. The mother is sitting on the western balcony watching the sable wings of darkness close over the white shaft that marks the resting place of the entombed husband. The hopeless longing of the dark eyes, the white, furrowed face, and the snowy hair tell a tale of endless woe. Her companions are only two; one, an elderly man with the frost and sorrow of many winters bleaching his hair; the other a woman, apparently twenty-and-five summers old; owing to the striking resemblance to the elder lady she would pass

for her daughter. The veil of darkness is thickening.

"There has been no change since—"

"No," he said anticipating what she wished to say.

"Will her face never grow old?"

"Never," he said sorrowfully.

"And what will become of her? we can't live much longer. She is like something embalmed. Oh, God! could I live with her."

The young lady never turned her dark head. There is something remarkably thrilling and interesting in the cold placidity of the monotonous face,—we say monotonous because it is always the same. The changeless expression, the hungry, vacant and empty intentness of her eyes; the marble whiteness and stillness of the broad classic forehead, had withstood the mutations of time for twenty years without a solitary alteration. The old man lives and breathes in the presence of this cold, canny mystery—the impersonation of a living death; this inflexible, expressionless and mechanical woman is the light and hope of his heart. For hours at a time he studies the dark eyes for some faint glimmer of returning intelligence, but none ever comes. He loves her, she is the concentration of all his energy. All hope, all ambition, all adoration fall blighted at her feet; and he continues to live in the gloom and shadow of her geometrical outlines.

THE END.





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